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On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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On the Wings of the Swan

Volume VI



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On the Wings of the Swan

Volume VI

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
from 1998 to 2006*



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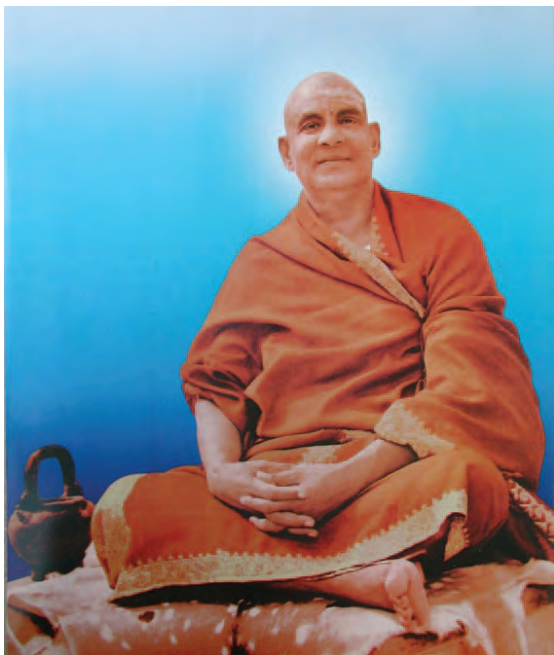
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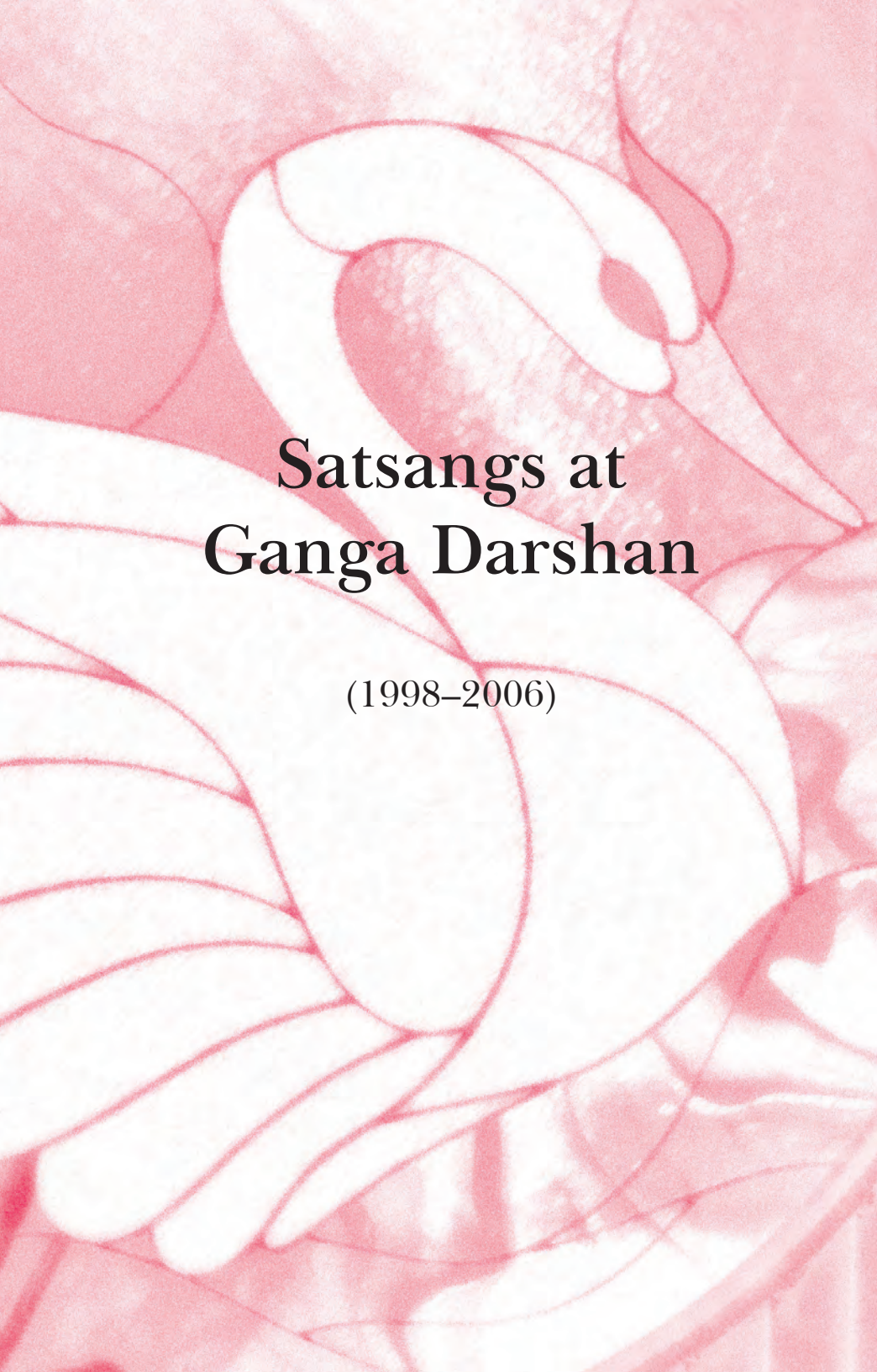


Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(1998–2006)

1998

YOGA AND TANTRA

While yoga has been more widely accepted than tantra around the world, at the same time one needs to know that yoga is an offshoot, a part of tantra. Therefore, we find that many components of tantra, such as mantra and concentration on yantra, are inbuilt in the yogic tradition. The definition of yoga is to experience the unity between body, mind and spirit. These three experiences are an integral part of human evolution.

The entire structure of yoga is vast. It gives an understanding of how the physical body works and how we can channel the energies active in the physical dimension; this is knowledge of the annamaya and pranamaya koshas. It gives an understanding of the energies and functions of the various attributes of the mind; this is knowledge of manomaya kosha. It gives an understanding of the human consciousness, not in its limited form but also in its cosmic, universal form; this is knowledge of vijñanamaya kosha. It gives the realization that our true, essential nature is not confined to worldly, sensorial, sensual experiences, but that there is a dimension which is beyond the senses where we experience the optimal, homogeneous and integrated form of human consciousness, where pain and suffering associated with the world of name, form and idea do not exist, where

there is understanding, experience and living bliss; this is knowledge of anandamaya kosha.

In order to provide insight into these various dimensions of human experience, yoga uses different techniques. Some are its own techniques, some came from its parent body, tantra, others from the traditions of Vedanta and Samkhya. In fact, yoga is a thread joining different systems of thought, traditions and philosophies together. A mala has individual beads, but they are strung together on one thread. Similarly, tantra, Samkhya, Vedanta and other philosophies are considered to be individual and unique in their own right. What makes them useful, of human utility, is the component of yoga which brings them together and creates a clear picture of the beliefs, philosophies, techniques and principles of these various systems of thought. Therefore, to think that yoga is an independent individual belief system or philosophy is inappropriate and does not do justice to the aim and purpose of yoga.

Mantra

The purpose of mantra is to liberate the mental dimension from its self-created bondage. This is the definition of the word *mantra*. Mantra is the force that can liberate the mind from the forces of illusion and ignorance and raise the level of the mind to experience its real nature. In this context, mantras are associated with the realization of manomaya kosha. They are not just sounds or words of power associated with different deities. Mantras have different meanings: some are yogic mantras, some are universal mantras, some are religious mantras. We have created these different associations with a particular person, concept or belief; however, these mantras existed before we were able to create our own associations.

Mantras have been recognized in every culture and tradition, whether it is Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Vedanta or Samkhya. According to Christian thought, in the beginning was the word, and the word was God. The

word is the mantra. According to upanishadic thought, it is *Om*. The *Mandukya Upanishad* states in the first sloka: *Omityetatadakasharamidam sarvam tasyopavyaakhyaanam bhootam bhavadbhavishyaditi sarvamomkaara eva* – “The word, *Om*, the primordial sound, represents the past, the present and the future, the finite and the infinite.” These are some of the attributes of the sound *Om*. In this way, if you look into every tradition, you will find the concept of mantra already existed before human beings were created on this planet.

Mantra represents the divine, cosmic force, the transformative, superhuman force. Words always convey a meaning. Sounds always convey a meaning; they have a particular pitch, frequency and vibration. This pitch, frequency and vibration is understood by the human mind, not only intellectually but also psychically. Human beings have made the mistake of trying to rationalize everything through the intellect. That is the greatest mistake a human being can make. Intellect is only one component of the mind. There are many components and attributes of the mind which receive, filter and process the information received by an individual in the form of words, in the form of vibrations, in the form of the existing environment. Therefore, the point that needs to be emphasized is that mantras are powerful transformative agents.

Yantra

Yantras are also powerful symbols of the deep unconscious; they are symbols of the psychic personality. Just as we can associate images in the conscious mind with objects in and around the world, similarly yantras represent symbols and images that are inherent in creation, that are archetypes of human consciousness representing the growth of the human mind. Not a lot of work has been done to understand the real meaning of yantras, as at present our knowledge is limited. Yantras are the real symbols that link the individual with the real consciousness. Yantras are vehicles by which you can experience transcendental

consciousness. Yantra is used in yoga to give us realization of vijñānamaya kośha.

Tantra is the mother of yoga, but unfortunately tantra is misunderstood in today's social system and belief structure. There has been degeneration in our belief structures, and this applies to everything in life. We are not able to know the essence of religions or the essence of philosophies; we are not even able to know normal human relationships. Our belief structure revolves around the human individual: what 'I' believe to be true; that is all. There is no acceptance any more of what is real and applicable universally; there is only acceptance of what 'I' feel is appropriate for me, and nothing more than that. Due to self-created imbalance, disharmony and selfishness, we are not able to look into the reality behind the appearance.

This has also happened with tantra. Many people today think of tantra as a practice involving drinking wine, eating meat, having sexual affairs, and using mantras and yantras to control and manipulate others. People associate tantra with magic: both good and bad, depending on its use. However, tantra has three aspects: sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. Tamasic tantra can be associated with manipulation and power. Rajasic tantra is associated with personal projection. Sattwic tantra is a tool used only to transcend one's limitations. Unfortunately, in the world today, tamasic tantra is the one recognized as tantra. Sattwic tantra is the worthwhile one, but very few people know about it. Nevertheless, yoga is a part of tantra. In fact, there is a system in tantra known as *yogachara*, living the yogic way. All the practices of yoga, be it hatha yoga, raja yoga, Sage Patanjali's yoga, Swami Sivananda's yoga, the Satyananda or Iyengar systems of yoga, all fall into the category of *yogachara*.

In the course of time, as the level of human consciousness rises, maybe the true teachings of tantra will come to light again; however, until then you should perfect the understanding of yoga.

—31 January 1998

Please explain the saying, *Naham karta Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam*. How can one imbibe this in one's life?

The meaning of *Naham karta Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam* is very simple. It is the knowledge, the wisdom that you are not the thinker, that somebody is guiding your thoughts. You are not the actor; someone is acting through you. You are not the performer; someone is performing through you, and the one who is performing through you is the Cosmic Self, Hari. It is the knowledge of a jnani, it is the feeling of a bhakta, and it is the life of a person who acts. However, first knowledge of one's identity must develop. Nobody seems to have knowledge of their identity. The discovery has to be made by asking the question, "What kind of a nature do I have?"

You do not have to imbibe *Naham karta*, just as you do not have to imbibe love. It is there; it is a natural thing. Do you have to imbibe courage? No, it is just there as a natural expression. Similarly, having the ability to understand *Naham karta* is the natural expression of a person who has become the *drashta*, the seer or the witness. *Drashta* does not mean being aware of your ability to witness twenty-four hours a day. It means the one who experiences *Naham karta*. The state of *sanyam* or self-restraint is the state of *drashta*.

Being a *drashta* is a natural expression. It represents the state in which you have surrendered; you live your life with the attitude of surrender. This is a very beneficial and real experience, as at the time of surrender we renounce our personal possessions and purposes. This is bhakti yoga, in which one is without personal purposes, like Mirabai. One has to let go of certain things after developing awareness. There has to be awareness of one's interactions in life; both right and wrong should be observed. One should not try to be a hero from a zero. Slowly, one's mind, attitudes and thoughts develop and improve. This is one of the prerequisites for understanding the state of surrender.

Surrender is not a state that can be talked about by the rational mind, as the rational mind always sees difference:

you and I, the duality. The dual concept is always seen by the rational mind. Until now, the rational mind has not seen the singular mind, the unified mind, and for that you have to be slightly irrational. Letting go of the attraction to being rational is being irrational, and then it is accepting, knowing, realizing and moving forward in happiness, contentment, bliss and peace. That becomes the nature. However, it also depends on which karma is manifesting in your life, as different karmas manifest at different times.

Some karmas alter your lifestyle, or your life's beliefs for a period of one month, and then suddenly you realize that what you were doing was an experiment to improve your understanding. Sometimes the karma is for a few years; sometimes it is for a lifetime. One is never the master of one's destiny. Which karma is manifesting when, and what affects you in which way, nobody can say or guarantee. If you start thinking of one aspect you become stuck. If you think of love you become stuck in love; if you think of anger you are stuck in anger; if you think of depression you are stuck in depression, or its opposite, exhilaration, extreme happiness. This happens in your life. Haven't you gone into depression and also to the highest point of happiness? Going from high to low is a result of cause and effect.

Karmas decide how we are going to be in health and sickness. Some people have a raging body problem for years. They are not one hundred percent healthy. Some have an aversion to bright light or loud noise. Karmas also manifest in this form. Some people overindulge in food; eating is the apex of happiness in their lives. We all have our experience of an apex. It is karma which takes you to the apex, and then it changes, and simultaneously changes come about in your lifestyle too: what is known as becoming mature, having a bit more understanding, having a bit more wisdom. Of course, with your personal effort you can be stronger in the face of adverse situations. You may not overcome them, but you will be a much stronger person, a much stronger being.

Naham karta Hari karta. It is part of your life and you cannot escape from it. Even on your death bed, in the final moment of your life on planet earth, the final moment before you depart from this body, suddenly the realization comes that this is the end of an experience and death is the next step. Therefore, even in life there is no continuity. There is a beginning of the physical body and physical interaction, and there is an end of the physical body and physical interaction. There is a beginning of mental interaction in life and an end of mental interaction in life. Both are objects of your happiness and suffering. There is a limited area of the spirit's light that is being illumined; that is all, and one has to work through it.

—12 September 1998

Introductory talk to Bihar Yoga Bharati Certificate Course students

An ashram is different to a household or a regular institution. In an ashram there is definitely discipline. This discipline is there at a personal level, at an institutional level, at an ashram level and at your spiritual level.

Personal discipline as taught in an ashram is, 'Try to think before acting, don't react'. This is the personal discipline. Not everyone can do this. Some can live this discipline five percent, some ten percent, others thirty, fifty, seventy, ninety or one hundred percent. It is up to the ability and effort of the individual. Next there is the institutional discipline. Certain routines have to be followed if you want to derive maximum fulfilment from life within the institution. The routine of the institution is the main discipline. The ashram discipline is to try and maintain your positivity, optimism, creativity and spirituality. These are the disciplines of an ashram. An institution has a set of disciplines and an individual has a set of disciplines within an ashram environment.

Bihar Yoga Bharati is an experiment in this ashram environment. It is not a university in the usual sense of the

word. It is 'deemed to be a university', which means that what it teaches and identifies is not the general subjects as in a regular university, but a specific subject that is beneficial for nurturing and enriching life, if followed as it is taught. I am sure many of you must have compared ashram life to army camp life at one time or another. When you were faced with a barrier and you could not go forward, this kind of a thought would have come. It comes into the minds of everyone, but it is part of the process of ashram growth, your growth; that is what the ashram represents.

There are many different centres, locations and areas in the world, and they represent different things to different people. There are places that inspire *vairagya*, non-attachment. There are areas in society that represent other things. Some inspire compassion, some inspire love, some inspire commitment, some inspire faith in God, some inspire a set of disciplines, others inspire mind control, self-control. There are different fields of expertise, each one having its own set of thoughts and ideas, which nurture a philosophy and a belief. This is a yoga-oriented centre. It believes in the system of yoga as propounded by Sage Patanjali, as propounded by the hatha yogis and raja yogis, and which is carried on in the lineage of Swami Sivananda.

Swami Sivananda gave a very simple definition of spiritual life and the process of evolution, which was the eighteen ITIES: serenity, regularity, absence of vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity, non-irritability, adaptability, humility, tenacity, integrity, nobility, magnanimity, charity, generosity and purity. These eighteen words ending in 'ity' represent the flowering of spiritual life. If one could just live these eighteen ITIES for eighteen months, one would gain something invaluable in one's life, maybe absolute *sanyam*, control of the mind.

We identify the sequence of yoga as the eightfold path of Swami Sivananda. Just as we have the ashtanga yoga of Sage Patanjali, we have the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda. Whereas Sage Patanjali defined the aim of yoga

as the merging of individual consciousness with divine consciousness, Swami Sivananda defined the aim of yoga as the merger of one human being with their neighbour. Serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate and realize: these are the teachings.

There have been contributions not only in the social field or in stimulation of the intellectual dimension, but also to something very deep and spiritual. The sadhanas that Sri Swamiji has been doing in Rikhia, such as panchagni and other sadhanas of the tradition, are being seen for the first time. This is a luminosity that we are seeing in a disciple of Swami Sivananda.

It is this luminosity that further inspires and encourages us to look beyond ourselves, beyond our defined areas and parameters. The feeling comes that life is dedicated to the experience of divinity, whatever one does. When I am in administration this thought inspires me, when I do my sadhana this thought inspires me, when I am with people this thought inspires me, and when I am alone this thought inspires me: 'Yes! There is something in life that can be achieved.'

Divinity can be experienced not only by being a recluse, not only by shunning the responsibilities of life, but by doing them in a detached way. That is why here in the ashram we encourage the participation of everyone in different types of work: hard work, physical work, mental work, intellectual work. You may not appreciate it or enjoy it initially, but once you get into the rhythm and see the benefits you are reaping, there is a feeling, a sense of appreciation, that you observe growing within you. That has to be the inspiration, the light that inspires us in our lives. This is yoga; this is spirituality. Spirituality is not only Ishwara pranidhana, spirituality is not only thinking about God all day and night. That is a sadhana to stop the flirtation of the mind, because the mind is like a bee; it keeps going from flower to flower to collect the pollen. That is the mind.

A principle can inspire you; however, only you can live the truth and the reality. That inspiration gives you

the strength and the satisfaction. We have to understand things in this spirit. Then you can say, “Yes, I am a yogi, I am a sadhaka, I am an aspirant.” This applies to all the spiritual disciplines and religions, whether it be Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, whether it be the vedic precepts and lifestyle, whether it be a subject, a belief, a philosophy, a thought, a religion like Buddhism, Jainism or Sikhism, or whether it be a broad-based universal religion applicable to millions on this planet.

All the disciplines, systems and religions need to adhere to a set of anushasana. The word *anushasana* is normally translated as discipline, but anushasana is not discipline; it is knowledge of the subtle self. This has also been the opening statement of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras: Atha yoga anushasanam* – “Thus, the anushasana of yoga.” What is yoga? Yoga is nothing but a set of different realizations, of knowing that ‘I am this’; that is all. It is knowledge of the subtle self, being the seer, the drashta, the controller, the observer of the subtle self, the subtle nature, the subtle personality.

Disciplines are social in nature, whereas anushasana is personal and spiritual in nature. ‘Think before you act, don’t react’ is an anushasana. ‘Sit down quietly and still the mind’ is an anushasana; it is a mandate. Perfect harmony in your life is anushasana; it is a mandate of yoga. Yoga is nothing but a set of anushasana by which you can come closer to the inner spirit, the inner nature, and only after that does the philosophy ‘Let Thy will be done’ evolve in life. Right now it is, ‘God, you do my will then I will think of you.’ We offer worship in the temples with the hope that God will grant us offspring, with the hope of overcoming a problem in the home, the family, the workplace, with the hope of having financial security.

Nobody has searched for God with a pure heart. Nobody has worshipped God without a selfish reason. There is a verse by Shankaracharya:

*Oh God! Forgive my three great sins.
My first sin was asking you for things,
forgetting that you are omniscient.
I looked for you in different nooks and corners,
in temples, in churches, in homes, in mosques,
in gurudwaras, in shrines, in ashrams, in monasteries,
forgetting that you are omnipresent.
I dared to think about you,
forgetting that you are beyond all thought.
I dared to speak about you,
forgetting that you are beyond words.*

This is Ishwara pranidhana. When you and God are not two beings but *Tat Tvam Asi* – “I am That”, then that stage is known as Ishwara pranidhana. Let Thy will be done. Make me an instrument of Thy peace. Wherever there is discord let me sow love. That is Ishwara pranidhana. This stage cannot be achieved by thinking only. You have to create the right ground for it to be nurtured in your life; you have to think along these lines as well. You also have to see whether or not you fit into this environment, with the discipline and the routine. If you can fit in and adjust, so much the better for all of us. If you can’t fit in, then we will say, ‘Hari Om’ to each other.

—5 October 1998

Through the sufferings of life and the inspirations that come as we progress in spiritual life, and through guru’s teachings, we begin to realize that many things we thought were normal parts of life are wrong. We start to introduce changes, like living in the present and reducing our needs; however, these changes seem clumsy as we are beginners and such changes are not valued by our society. How can we stay steady on this new path without disturbing others’ values or letting old values take over again?

The question is in many different parts. First of all, society’s values are not wrong, nor are the things that we

learn in society. Society does not differentiate between one human being and another. There are theories that say the individual is influenced by society; however, we believe that the individual is a part of society. Each person has a responsibility to defend certain values in society, keeping in mind what the aim and the final outcome of life should be.

We cannot seem to learn how to use our common sense. We may think that we do, but in reality we do not. If we apply our common sense to the experiences and education we imbibe from society, then there will be a clear distinction and definition of what is beneficial for the growth of the individual and of society. What are the barriers to the development of the individual and society? There are so many things that we know should not be done but we do them. We become habituated to drugs, alcohol and smoking, and we know that overindulgence in them can lead to ill health, yet we ignore the right concept and become the slave of a bad habit due to a lack of common sense.

There are a million things that one can definitely say are detrimental to human health and human life. Why do we keep on doing them, not only at a personal level, but also at a global level? It is nothing but lack of common sense, and as human beings we have not learned the application of common sense. To begin with, we have become too self-centred. 'I, me and mine' has become the dominant factor in our lives. This deep individual or personal identity limits the vision and the perception of the global reality. When the perception of the global reality becomes clouded, then we cannot connect with anything else except our own ambitions and desires, which stem from selfishness. Such people say that rules are meant to be broken.

As a result of this self-centred awareness, we project our aspirations for the future, we try to see ourselves in an image that we were never cut out for, and we find security in experiences of the happy moments of the past. Whenever we remember our past, we always remember the joyous moments and identify with them, and that is what we project

for our future, too. If you see this as the right way to live then there is nothing to say, but if you see some fault in this type of living then you can fill in the gaps for yourself.

What is the definition of a balanced lifestyle? A balanced lifestyle is one in which you are able to integrate and harmonize the experiences, first at the individual level of body, mind and spirit, and then at the social level, through care and support, inspiration and motivation. In this way, you not only improve yourself, but society and the environment as well. However, the care and nurturing of society has to be done from a selfless perspective, not a selfish one.

All the different forms of creation live for others. It is only human beings that live for themselves. Look at nature around you. Trees give their fruit to others; they do not eat it themselves. They do not say, "This is my fruit and I will eat it," they say, "The fruit is ripe; you take it, eat it and enjoy it." If you look at other aspects of nature, you will find something similar. Are you able to see the difference between other forms of creation and yourself? If you can't, there is nothing to say. If you can, then you have something to think about.

The thrust of yoga, or any spiritual subject, belief or philosophy, is that one should learn to live in the present. Yoga is not against any social thoughts or values. It is for the improvement of the quality of life. The philosophy of yoga is: 'Gain wisdom from past experiences and use that wisdom to improve the present'. The future is unknown. Let it be. There are certain things in life that have to remain mysteries. The future should and must remain a mystery. Life before birth should and must remain a mystery. Ideas about God should and must remain a mystery.

Apart from these, you have accumulated a set of experiences in your life. Have they meant anything to you until today? Have you derived any wisdom from them? Or have they simply been like a film in your own mind? If we have to give a purpose or aim to human life, we must be

practical. We should say that the aim and purpose of life is to derive wisdom. Wisdom does come into everyone's life, but like opportunity, which also knocks on everyone's door, we ignore it. This is due to the restricted conditionings of the self.

Any effort to improve life does not begin externally. The seed is first planted in the mind. It is nurtured and grows in the mind, in the form of motivation, in the form of desire, in the form of wanting to do something, and then it is implemented in action. If you can make sure that the seed is a healthy one, not a sick one, that is changing the normal, natural state of mind through discipline, then you will begin to realize that the values, ideas and concepts that felt alien in the beginning have become a natural part of your life. The thrust in society has been to project the external life. This is the difference.

When you look at a tree, what do you see? You see the trunk, the branches, the leaves and the flowers. However, the support of the tree is the roots, which cannot be seen. If the roots are destroyed, the tree will die. Similarly, the social mentality is to nurture and encourage the health of the body and the health of the mind, but not the health of the spirit, which is the root of our life.

Previously in society it was 'survival of the fittest'. Today it is 'survival of the weakest'. You may be sick and ailing, yet you are kept alive with medication. You may be a vegetable, but kept alive in a hospital. I am not saying anything against the medical, technological and scientific achievements, for everybody loves life. However, just look at the trend of how certain ideas have been emphasized by the externalized social mentality, or the overindulging materialistic society.

We look after the body and there is no harm in that; it should be done. We look after the mind and there is no harm in that; it should be done. However, we also need to make an effort to maintain the health of the spirit. Before the advent of modern psychology and psychiatry, people used to say, "Look after the body. What happens to the mind

does not really matter as it is the body that is important and should remain healthy.” As the concept of psychology slowly evolved, people started saying, “Mental health is also necessary. Remain free from stress and tension, do not go through emotional conflict. Let psychoanalysts, psychiatrists and counsellors treat the mental side.”

If we talk of spiritual sickness, then people say, “How can the spirit be sick?” Of course it can be sick. Just as the roots of a tree can become weak, sick and die, similarly the spirit can become weak, sick and die. People say that the spirit is immortal, but this is nonsense. The spirit, the life-force that resides in the body, is subject to birth and death, and anything that is subject to birth and death goes through infirmity, through decay.

There are other dimensions of the spirit, just as there are many dimensions of the mind. Just as psychologists say there is the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, the unconscious mind and, beyond that, the super-conscious mind, similarly, there are levels and dimensions of the spirit: the spirit contained in the body; the spirit contained in nature; the spirit contained in the universe, the created dimension; the spirit of the non-visible dimension, the divine spirit. These are the different expressions that the seers have used in the past.

The spirit is defined as *jivatma*, *atma* and *paramatma*. These are the three distinct definitions of the spirit. When there is a distinction, then obviously there has to be a difference in the quality, in the nature of the spirit. One has to understand the difference between the normal concept and belief about the spirit and the actual concept of the spirit, as it is relevant to one’s life, growth and evolution.

The direction of spiritual teaching is to bring about harmony in the experience of body, mind and spirit. If you look at it from this perspective, once harmony begins to set in then one goes through purification. Habits change, ideas change, beliefs change, and if you try to use those ideas, beliefs and habits to improve your own self-image, then

there is a reaction from society. You try to become a prophet overnight in order to profit! The change has to come from within.

—12 October 1998

How do you see women working within the patriarchal system of yoga? How may they interpret the teachings with their female nature and potential?

According to the tradition, yoga is not a patriarchal system. Historically, from the time of Rama, Krishna and the vedic age, there were many female luminaries, gurus, sadhus and saints. These women had higher status than their male counterparts. A shift took place about a thousand years ago when India was invaded. At that time, there was a social consensus that women should be kept in the household and not in public positions, in order to protect them. From that point on, the tradition of women saints diminished because women were unable to go out and pursue a spiritual direction. Of course, times have changed, but the mentality has not.

In our opinion, women are better qualified to interpret the teachings of yoga. The feminine nature is not so rational or intellectual; it is more psychic, intuitive and sensitive to the changes that take place in the personality of an individual. Females project an image of compassion, kindness, caring, loving and nurturing, whereas males tend to project an image of strength and firmness.

God is full of feminine qualities. If God is compassion, then it is a feminine quality. If God is love, then it is a feminine quality. If God is caring, then it is a feminine quality. The experience of spirit, according to all the traditions, is the experience of the final state of Prakriti and Purusha. Shiva is the last factor that has to be recognized and realized. However, if the search for Shiva takes place through the energy of Shakti, and Shakti represents and is the epitome of all the feminine attributes, then in reality it

is only a woman who can understand, transmit and explain the yogic, vedic and tantric traditions.

To reinstate women in their proper role in this tradition, an opportunity has to be provided wherein the full dimension of the philosophy, the practices and the thoughts behind the practices, can be explained to them. They should be taken through a process wherein they can become better masters than their male counterparts. There is no question about it. A change is taking place. In our own organization the female force outnumbers the male by sixty to forty. Maybe in a century or so we will have a line-up of female gurus, and I hope I live long enough to welcome that.

—30 November 1998

What is the difference between self-confidence, self-esteem and ego?

Self-confidence is having belief in yourself, having trust in your abilities, having the conviction that you can achieve and attain. Self-esteem is seeing oneself in a positive light, seeing the positive and creative dimensions of one's life and living according to them. Self-esteem is knowing what your abilities and strengths are, what your limitations are, knowing how to manage them, and knowing that you are there to help all those who need your help.

Ego is knowing that 'I exist'. The negative side of ego is arrogance and hard-headedness. The positive side of ego is appreciation of the self, and being thankful for existence, for being alive. Maintaining that identity that 'I live, I exist' is awareness of your existence.

—30 November 1998

How can one be confident without becoming egotistical?

Confidence has nothing to do with ego. Confidence is knowledge, understanding and awareness of one's strengths and ability to deal with a situation. When you know you are

the master of the circumstance or event and can control it, and you have the wisdom to know what is right and wrong and act according to dharma, that is confidence. There is bound to be ego, whether you do anything or not. Ego is your personality; life without ego is no life.

Ego is subject to the three gunas. Sattwa guna leads to a deeper awareness and understanding of how one can link with the cosmic consciousness. At this point the sattwic ego becomes the motivating factor to unite with the transcendental. When this sattwic ego becomes subject to the influences of the senses and mind, it becomes rajasic. When it becomes rajasic, it begins to manipulate the expressions of the personality. It manipulates thoughts, it manipulates ambitions, it manipulates desires. You are affected by it and other people are affected by your actions. When this ego identifies with the basic instincts in your life, then it becomes tamasic. These are the three expressions of ego. The pure ego is known as sattwa; it is the enlightened ego which unites the individual being with the cosmic being. In association with the senses and mind the ego becomes rajasic, and in association with the instincts it becomes tamasic.

All experiences, whether of compassion and love, or jealousy and hatred, are connected. All the positive and negative emotions, and all the positive and negative expressions of intellect, of manas, buddhi and chitta, are connected with the ego. Thousands of strands from the dimensions of manas, buddhi and chitta emanate from and enter the ego, *ahamkara*. Whenever there is movement in one of the strands, the vibration will be felt by the ego. Stimulation and activity will be felt by the ego. If you love somebody, the ego is being touched. If you feel compassion towards somebody, the ego is being stimulated. If you hate somebody, the ego is being activated. Ego is the final state of individual experience.

Confidence can affect the ego; however, if the ego is tamasic, there will be one kind of reaction and if the ego is sattwic, the reaction will be different. Love can influence the

ego, but the experience of love will be different in the sattwic ego compared to the experience in the tamasic ego.

Apart from jnana yoga, the only other way of managing the rajasic ego and the tamasic ego is through the path of bhakti. Very few people can manage the ego through the path of *jnana*, knowledge. Only a person of a special calibre, like Ramana Maharishi or Swami Vivekananda, with an enlightened buddhi can possibly manage their egos, sattwic, tamasic and rajasic, through jnana yoga, whereas the majority of people can learn to manage their ego through bhakti yoga.

In this context, bhakti is not the path of devotion but the path of becoming acutely aware of the need to channel one's feelings and emotions towards transcendence rather than towards the mundane. If you channel your feelings, emotions and actions toward transcendence by dedicating, surrendering and transforming them and by feeling that you are only a medium, a tool, then these egos can be managed. Therefore, bhakti is a tool for channelling the expressions of human life towards transcendence. You need to understand bhakti in this context and not as yoga of devotion.

Just as fulfilment is a natural process after having eaten a full meal, devotion is a natural outcome of diverting oneself from the mundane to the transcendental. When you eat food it fills the stomach, not the mind, yet in the mind you feel happy and the thought comes, 'Now I am full, happy, well-fed, and my heart is content.' Why are all these thoughts coming when all you did was fill your stomach with food? Just as there is a science of mental and inner fulfilment when you eat, similarly, devotion becomes a natural expression. It is not something you need to learn. What one has to learn is how to channel the expression of emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions towards transcendence. That is the way to manage the ego.

—30 November 1998

Please clarify the difference between attachment and non-attachment. It seems that so many of the world's problems have occurred because we are detached from ourselves, other people and the earth, which leads to violence. How can we fully express ourselves as human beings whilst remaining non-attached, or as actors?

Attachment is an attraction or a like which we express in many different ways to people, situations, possessions, and definitely in our own projections and communications. We do not know how to live without attachment. The yogic concept has been defined in the *Yoga Sutras* as a condition that can either create some form of attraction whether sensory, sensual, emotional, intellectual, subjective, or objective, or some form of repulsion; *raga* and *dvesha*, like and dislike. This is the concept of attachment in a nutshell. It is the human tendency to identify with, to link up and relate to something very intimately from a very personal point of view. We cannot develop objectivity in that situation because we are constantly projecting ourselves.

Detachment is a strong word. Our understanding of detachment is to repulse something to which we are attached or attracted. This is where the negative qualities of the human mind come to the surface and make a person insensitive and self-centred. Reactions that happen due to the influence of such negative individual traits can often lead to discord and disharmony.

Yoga says no to detachment. Do not avoid situations in life or even in yourself, but learn to accept the existence of the things that are around you. Once you have accepted them and know their nature, then it is possible to become non-attached. The word 'non-attachment' does not really exist in English, but it exists in Sanskrit in the form of *vairagya*, meaning to be free from attachment, without rejecting anything. It represents a state of mind that is continuously observing the nature of events and is unaffected. Non-attachment can easily be developed provided we can expand our awareness to see the reality behind things.

The word 'vairagya' is composed of two words: *raga* meaning attraction and *vi* meaning not to be affected. 'Vi' is a prefix which in combination with *raga* means 'not being affected by attraction'. It goes without saying that once we are attracted to something, the possessive qualities of our nature and ego manifest. Sometimes that attraction can be positive, sometimes negative. We have to look at things from their positive as well as their negative aspect. When attraction is negative it is limiting; when attraction is positive it is freeing. It gives a different vision of things.

Positive attraction is known as non-attachment, acceptance of situations without reacting negatively to them. It is like the prayer of St Francis of Assisi: "Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is discord let me sow love." This is not a philosophical statement, but a very practical one.

We tend to run away from discord. We do not have the strength to plant the seeds of love where there is absolute discord. However, if *vairagya* is practised, what is the state of mind at that time? It is not detachment or attachment, it is not a reaction. It is acceptance of a condition as being real. Discord and anger are real, so what is the use of reacting against them? The moment we react, we are creating a process within ourselves which recognizes the negativity, and the moment that happens, our mind, nature and behaviour are affected by that impression. Our past impressions and memories bring up the corresponding negative emotion and we project anger, frustration or discord, more so than it actually is. Therefore, non-attachment is a state of mind which is full of *viveka*, discrimination. Have the ability to discriminate and act accordingly. That is the yogic concept of non-attachment.

—4 December 1998

If God is everywhere, why is the master worshipped as a living manifestation of God, and not everything else?

God is everywhere, but can you experience God everywhere? Can you see God in a tree? Can you see God in a stone? You may say yes; however, if I ask whether you can see God in your enemy, at that point you will say no. If I ask whether you can see God in a person who is maimed and suffering from leprosy, you will say, "No, he is suffering from his own karmas." You don't see God there; therefore, the basic philosophy behind the question is wrong.

The vision and experience of God is not a matter that you can think about intellectually and say, "God is everywhere." People have been saying it for thousands of years and you are also thinking it. However, has it made any difference to you? You still suffer from your hang-ups, from your anxieties, from your fears. It has made no difference to you.

If you think God is everywhere then you should try to experience that. However, somebody has to teach you how to experience the all-pervasive power of God. So far, you have not been able to do so under your own steam. It is only that person who has, in one form or another, experienced the nature of God who can indicate the way. Once you are on the right track then areas open up in which you can feel and experience that godly nature. Then the guru simply becomes a catalyst to provide you with that experience. Guru does not go with you until the end of your journey; guru puts you on the right track. Guru is a guide only, not a crutch with which to support yourself until the end of your journey.

Thus the question, "Can't I have a direct relationship with God?" is also answered. It is not possible to have a direct relationship with God in your present frame and state of mind. When you go to different places, you have to change the mind pattern. Your mind pattern is different when you go to a concert, when you go to work, when you come home, when you go to an ashram. Similarly, when you go to God the mind pattern has to be different. You cannot go with this

type of mind pattern. It is impossible, as God is not an object you can see with your eyes. God is not a form you can touch with your hands. God is not an idea you can think about with your mind. God is the totality of life, both living and non-living. In order to develop a relationship you need to have that level of awareness, consciousness and understanding.

At present you cannot even understand your own nature, your own fears or desires. You don't know how to handle them and you want to experience God. It is a self-contradiction in every respect. It is not something easy where you can say, "I know God, I have realized God." It is a state of being. You have to go through the process of becoming. The master can help establish that connection provided you are truthful, sincere, innocent and devoted.

—4 December 1998



1999

YOGA AND ECOLOGY

The subject of ecology does not exist in isolation. It is linked with the economy and with industry, and for this reason it is very difficult for people in the world today to become environmentally aware. At the social level, the environment is related to industry and commerce. At the individual level, it is linked with how the individual perceives the environment in which he or she lives. Each individual either connects with or isolates himself from nature due to other compulsions and needs.

Lifestyle is the key

Our relationship with nature is linked with our attitude towards life in general, whether we are happy and contented or dissatisfied and unhappy with our lifestyle. This will reflect the way we see the world around us and whether we respect or mistreat it.

The yamas and niyamas in yoga are indicative of this interaction within the individual, the laws of nature, and the Divine. *Shaucha*, for example, which is defined as cleanliness, is not only personal; it is environmental as well. It is not only hygiene; it is being responsible for the expression and experience of beauty in one's life and also in the environment. Beauty gives birth to joy and happiness; that is the outcome of beauty.

If the garden is beautiful, it also creates a change in the atmosphere and environment. When you walk into the garden, your spirits are uplifted. The beauty of the garden is physical, but at the same time it also has an impact on the environment and on your mental state. If the awareness dawns that you are responsible for making your home, your environment and your world a beautiful place, then that is the first step towards a proper integration with nature. It is an understanding of the individual's interaction with nature on the one hand, and with the divine on the other that can make one ecologically whole.

There are many dimensions to ecology: material and spiritual. No individual can make a difference to material ecology, especially where industry and commerce are concerned. To do this we would have to change the entire legal and political structure of every society. Therefore, there will always be exploitation. Change can only come from our personal lifestyle. A change in our individual attitude and interaction with life is the only approach to changing the way we understand the world and its ecosystems.

The science of ecology is linked closely with human society and its needs, the needs of industry and commerce. The human component, our understanding of human participation and involvement in nature, is relatively small. Still we see ourselves outside of ecology and the ecosystems we depend upon. There may be hundreds of 'greenie' rallies every day involving thousands of people, but they won't make a dent in the policies pursued by industry, commerce and governments. This can be seen globally.

Interdependence of all species

Ecology is a study of how different species and aspects of nature can work together and support each other. According to ancient calculations, there are 8,400,000 species in nature. Since the time scientists began to record different species, it has been found that approximately 1,500 species become extinct every year: species from the plant, animal, insect and

bacteria worlds. To date, only 200,000 varieties of species have been recorded by scientists.

In the vedic tradition it is clearly stated that the life of each species is meant for the wellbeing of all other species. All of the 8,400,000 species on the planet live for each other, except for one. One species lives for itself and that is the human species. If the human species could also live according to the laws of nature and in harmony with other species, the planet would become a very different place to live in. This is where the yogic perspective of ecology slowly begins to develop.

There was a time when humans also supported nature and the planet. The vedic tradition believes that dead bodies should be burnt, not buried. It is not a religious or a cultural belief. The vedic tradition is against burial because bodies are subject to different kinds of diseases. When you die of disease, the viruses and bacteria remain alive in the body. When the body is burnt, the diseases are also destroyed; however, if the body is buried, those viruses and bacteria spread underground and affect the water, trees and plants, making the environment polluted and diseased, and eventually contaminating the food we eat.

In the vedic tradition, only yogis and small children were given the right of burial. Small children's bodies are believed to be pure. Yogis can make their bodies pure through sadhana. Therefore, there is no harm in their being buried, but everyone else must be burnt. This is an ecologically conscious practice and belief.

In Christianity and in Islam this belief does not exist for different reasons. These two religions developed in arid, desolate desert places in the Middle East. There were no trees, therefore no wood, so bodies were buried under the sand. The quality of sand and the intensity of the sun in the desert is such that when the sand becomes hot, it is like a furnace. One grain of sand can hold a great degree of heat. If a body is buried in the sand, the body with its viruses and bacteria will be destroyed by the extreme heat. Soil, however,

retains far less heat. If a body is buried in soil, the bacteria will spread.

In our ignorance, we have incorporated such traditions into the religious system, and situations arise where a body may not be burnt for so-called religious reasons. It is the apex of human idiocy.

Benefits of a natural lifestyle

There are many other rules followed in the vedic tradition that are part of lifestyle and indicate concern for the environment. When a culture follows a rule created with an understanding of the laws of nature, then that culture can survive any onslaught from nature, no matter how great the destruction.

A few years ago there was a study comparing the agricultural potential of the United States of America, with a population of 200 million, and India, with a population of 900 million. With its present system of agricultural production and use of chemicals, the US has the potential to feed the entire population of the world for fifty years, on the strength of its soil. In India, which supports 900 million people, and in land dimensions is smaller than the US, the agricultural land has the potential to feed the entire world for three hundred years. Why is this so?

The difference is the lifestyle. If you can adopt a natural lifestyle, living according to the laws of nature and not trying to alter the natural conditions, then you are more ecology-conscious. When it is cold, you put on a sweater. When it is warm, you remove your clothes. However, if you try to heat a room or building by artificial means, then the chemicals will affect the atmosphere, as is already happening with the breakdown of the ozone layer due to the use of aerosols and CFC gas in air-conditioners and refrigerators. Therefore, more luxury and comfort goes against nature.

Why not do without momentary comforts? These comforts are artificial needs, not actual needs. Artificial needs support industry and commerce. You can cook your meals

simply, as in our ashram kitchen, with coal and wood, or you can buy a microwave to make quick meals. What will happen then? You will become aware that you don't have enough time and will need to do things as fast as possible.

People have many hang-ups about time, especially in modern, industrialized countries. They work very hard to fulfil the demands of artificial needs. You can live without a microwave. In fact, the food is tastier without it. Taste, health and many other benefits are sacrificed for the sake of an instant meal.

Cooking is a joy. Sit down, peel and cut up the vegetables. Imagine how you are going to prepare the meal. The flow of information from the vegetable to you and the flow of your interaction with an organic material is a very beautiful relationship. If you cannot devote one hour a day to cooking, you have lost the joy of living. If you cannot take a cold water bath in the middle of winter, without thinking, 'Oh, I wish I had hot water!' then you cannot enjoy the feel of that cold water, which gives better health, stamina and immunity to the body.

GOD: Generation, Organization and Destruction

With all the environmental movements and theories, one thing is certain. The cosmic consciousness is much more aware of the growth and destruction than the entire human population. If there is an imbalance somewhere, the consciousness of nature will take care of it. The only way it can do this is by creating destruction. That is the concept of the trinity, GOD: Generation, Organization and Destruction; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

At a gross, physical level, generation and creation seem to be complete; however, at a subtle level, generation is continuing. Organization, maintenance and continuation are happening. In fact, human beings are an intrinsic part of Vishnu consciousness, which preserves, maintains and nourishes. We do not have Brahma consciousness, the 'G' aspect of God, within us. We are in Vishnu consciousness, the 'O' aspect of God. An encounter with Shiva is like an

accident. Earthquakes, tragedy and death are encounters with 'D', which is Shiva. Whenever we have such encounters with 'D', destruction, it comes as a big shock to our system.

From the cosmic viewpoint, we are in Vishnu consciousness and at the level of *tamas*. We don't want change. We are shocked and get upset when we see the *rajasic* nature of Shiva, which is to come and clean everything, to come and destroy everything so that a new birth can take place. This is the way nature will heal and renew herself from the impact of the human race.

—9 January 1999

Should mantra be chanted without emotion?

How can one even think of practising mantra without *bhava*, without the quality of feeling? If you think about it, to think of any action or thought without emotion is hypocritical. When you get angry or feel frightened, is it without *bhava*? When you are under stress, is it without *bhava*? Any mental state, whether it is hatred, jealousy, frustration, anxiety, stress or passion, cannot exist without *bhava*, the associated feeling.

There has to be passion in mantra. In the beginning of mantra practice, the mantra is repeated mechanically because one does not know how to connect with the *bhava*. However, when you know how, then by combining the mantra with the *bhava*, the energy of the mantra intensifies.

That potency has the capacity to invoke God in a physical form in front of you, which means it can change any rule in creation. Mantra performed with *bhava* has the potential and the capacity to make God take a physical body and appear in front of you. If it has the capacity to command God to give *darshan*, you can imagine just how powerful the mantra is. Even God is subject to the power of the mantra. It is not the human mind that makes Him or Her appear before you; it is this declaration of God in the form of the mantra and God is bound by that declaration. Therefore, if God can accept the

supremacy of the mantra, cannot the power of the mantra change every kind of natural law? Those who have practised mantra with bhava have been able to perfect this quality and realize the full potency of the mantra.

To think of any practice without bhava is the sign of an immature mind, as mantra will become fruitful only when bhava is associated with it. Just as a feeling is associated with a state of anger, jealousy, stress and tension, or with what you eat and drink, or with a friend or enemy, similarly, a feeling is associated with a mantra. How then is it possible to keep the practice of mantra separate from the feeling associated with the mantra? It is not logical. Therefore, whenever you practise a mantra as part of mantra sadhana, or sing kirtan, you should also try to project the emotion associated with the mantra into it. Then when you chant or sing the mantra you are able to channel your emotions with full control, and that is quite an achievement for any human being.

Normally, logic follows a predetermined path and emotion follows a different path. Many times emotions cloud logic, and many times logic can suppress an emotion. However, when they complement each other, logic becomes an experience and emotion becomes an insight which gives you wisdom. Therefore, try to feel the emotion of the mantra when you repeat it. That is the real practice of mantra.

Mechanical repetition occurs in the first stage of mantra practice in order to stop the natural dissipation of the mind. Once the dissipation stops, then in order to awaken the state of consciousness, to experience the transformed condition inherent in the mantra, the bhava, the emotions, have to be added. Mechanical repetition of mantra is recommended in the first stage in order to create a pattern of mind, to develop an awareness of the mantra for longer periods of time. When you are able to do that, then, in the second stage, add the component of emotion, bhava, to the mantra and the result will be very beneficial and uplifting.

—1 April 1999

Does one have to know the meaning of the mantra?

In the early stage, if you are repeating the mantra mechanically, it is not necessary to know the meaning of the mantra. However, when the mantra is established in the mind and there is no effort to become aware of the mantra, then at that time the meaning of the mantra is revealed. The bhava becomes associated with the mantra and the meaning is revealed. It is realized intuitively; you recognize it as the underlying reality of the mantra. The guru can help you realize the meaning of the mantra, but not tell you. The meaning of the mantra being revealed and telling the meaning of the mantra are two different things.

Om Namah Shivaya translated literally means 'I bow down to Shiva, I salute Shiva'. The literal meaning can indicate an association through respect, faith, belief and devotion, the bhakti that an individual has for the divine. Those who understand the principle of Shiva will find this mantra very pleasing to their nature. They will relate to the bhakti, the aspect of surrendering with respect, gratitude and faith to a quality of the divine that they have felt in their life. In the same way, different people have found their heart and soul connection with Rama, Krishna, Durga, Devi, Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, or Mahavira, which are all different images of the divine force.

The literal meaning will stimulate a feeling in those people with that kind of nature. However, for most people, mantras thought of in that way are seen as adherence to a belief system representing a religion. The expression of one's sentiments towards something unique and pure becomes converted into a belief system, and that belief system becomes a religion. The extroverted nature of the human mind will always create a logical justification for everything, even if it is inaccurate and inappropriate. However, the revealed meaning of the mantra is different from the literal translation.

The revealed meaning instantaneously leads you to the experience of Shiva. That is why the guru cannot actually

tell you the meaning, but he can help you to understand the meaning. It is like this with every mantra, whether chanting *Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare, Jai Jai Rama Sita Rama, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, or any other mantra. The meaning of the mantra becomes revealed when the bhava, intense feeling, becomes associated with it. Therefore, in the end, bhava is the real meaning of the mantra.

—1 April 1999

THE TEACHINGS OF SRI KRISHNA

Sri Krishna was born 5,520 years ago. Before Krishna's birth there was a prophecy in relation to Kansa, a tyrannical king, that the eighth child of Kansa's sister would be the cause of his death. This child was Krishna, the son of Devaki and Vasudeva, born in a prison at Mathura. His childhood was spent in Gokul and Vrindavan with Yashoda and Nanda.

Krishna proved to be a child with extraordinary abilities. He was recognized as an avatara. What is an avatara? Does God actually take birth in the form of a human being? We don't know; however, according to all the conclusions, certain parameters have been defined that determine who a yogi is, who a siddha is, who an acharya is, who a sannyasin is and who an avatara is. In the course of Krishna's life, all the qualities of an avatara were seen in him, therefore he is considered to be an avatara. As thinkers, not as devotees or bhaktas, we can also accept that he had certain qualities which people at large do not have. He expressed himself in certain extra-human ways and was therefore endowed with extraordinary qualities.

Humanitarian purpose

Krishna's extraordinary qualities were seen when he was only a child. There is a purpose in everyone's life and the purpose of those whom we consider to be avatars, siddhas or yogis is a humanitarian one. The aim is to improve the quality of

life, to indicate a way, a process, a direction by which one can attain harmony, satisfaction and contentment.

The central theme of Krishna's life was not destruction of the wicked or protection of the pious. Despite what it says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, it would be unjustified to believe that he took birth for this purpose, for then he would not be an avatara. The relationship between the individual and God is not the relationship of the pious and the wicked. Wickedness is a personality trait or tendency. Interaction with the divine power take place in another dimension where wickedness is overcome by continuous remembrance and thinking of God. Even Kansa, who was wicked, did nothing but think and dream about Krishna from the time of the prophecy until the time of his death. Whether the remembrance was due to fear or affection is not important; the thought process was ongoing and constant. From the time of Sita's abduction until the time of his death, Ravana thought continuously about Rama.

The relationship that an individual has with God transcends their wicked and pious nature. Wickedness and piousness are external expressions of the human personality; however, the thought and remembrance that is continuous, ongoing and unbroken indicates the awareness and the relationship that one has with the higher power, with God.

Establishment of dharma

The focus of Krishna's life was the establishment of dharma. Dharma is identified as a *purushartha*, individual effort. Dharma is not a belief, a concept or a religion; dharma is action, effort. This action and effort should lead one to experiencing the divine nature that is dormant in every being. Krishna wanted to establish this concept of dharma right from the time he became self-aware.

In the festival of Ganga Dussehra, the women float candles or *deepaks*, little lamps, on the river as a form of worship. There is a story that when Krishna was very young he accompanied his mother, Yashoda, to the banks of the

river to watch this ritual. When he saw people floating little candles on the river, he entered the water himself and every time a deepak or candle floated by he would pick it up and put it on the riverbank.

When his mother asked him what he was doing, he replied, “Mother, all the candles that come near me I pick up and put on the shore. My little hands can’t reach the candles that are in midstream or near the other shore, but any deepak that floats towards me I pick up and put on the shore.”

Deepaks represent the individual souls who are floating in this stream of *samsara*, worldly existence. Those who are too far away go unattended, but those souls which float towards the godly nature are immediately picked up and saved. Coming close to the proximity of the divine is the purpose of dharma, nothing more.

Teachings on karma

Teachings that can bring us closer to God change from age to age, from civilization to civilization. In Satya Yuga, the first golden age of truth and purity, the method was *tapasya* or austerities. In this age, known as Kali Yuga, Buddha, Mahavira, Christ, and all the saints and sages, have said that the form of religion should be love and compassion. Being compassionate, loving and kind towards others is the teaching of these sages for this age.

What would the teachings have been in another time, in the past, when people had a different kind of lifestyle and were living according to the precepts of dharma? The relevant teaching for that age, as enunciated by Krishna, and as enunciated in the time of Rama, was involvement with karma. Rama did not say to be compassionate; it was part of the natural expression of that society. There was no poverty; everyone had plenty. There was no need to become charitable, as people were charitable, compassionate, loving and kind by nature; it was part of the expression of their personality. Today we are not charitable, loving and kind by nature; we are by our nature creating an egocentric and

self-centred society. Therefore, the teachings have to change according to the time and the mentality of the people who form a society.

In the times of Krishna and Rama, when there was affluence everywhere, when there was no rampant poverty, when adherence to dharma was an integral part of the human act, there was confusion as to whether to renounce action for the attainment of God or whether to involve oneself in action. Rama, and the teachings that Rama was exposed to, spoke about acceptance of action and living according to the demands of the situation. Krishna, and the teachings of Krishna, speak about accepting and realizing action. This idea is the underlying philosophy of life as practised in those times.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, emphasis was given to acceptance, performance and realization of actions. It is also said that knowledge of action, knowledge of human participation in life, in this creation, and understanding the role that each human being has to play is a secret subject that has never been revealed before. Nevertheless, it is only through perfection in action that one can improve the quality of life. This belief holds true even today.

Perfection in action

All the masters, after they have attained the highest realization, have involved themselves in hard karma. Buddha, after attaining nirvana, plunged himself into karma. He did not isolate himself from the world. Mahavira, after attaining nirvana, plunged headlong into karma. He did not seek the isolation of a mountaintop. Ramana Maharshi, after attaining moksha, plunged himself into karma. That has been the trend followed by every seer and saint in this age, whether it is Maharshi Dayananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda or Swami Satyananda.

When we see these living examples of people who have attained realization again involving themselves in action, we

have to think, as the common belief is that nothing needs to be done after realization, that one is free to retire to the mountains and lead a solitary life. It is possibly due to this misunderstanding that sadhakas have been unable to advance in spiritual life. We isolate ourselves by creating walls of silence around us, by meditating for ten or twenty hours a day; however, that has no meaning because the transformative experience of life lies in karma, not in meditation.

Karma, not meditation, has been the central philosophy of spiritual life. If followed sincerely, the state of meditation can be achieved within one year. However, what about the karma which binds your personality, your nature, your individuality to this plane, and which restricts the growth of human nature by becoming a *samskara*, an unconscious desire, an unconscious seed for happiness and contentment; how do we eradicate that? Meditation cannot eradicate the seeds created by karma. Meditation can provide you with mental, emotional and psychic strength, tranquillity and harmony. Whenever the grass grows, you can cut it and make it look beautiful on the surface, yet the weeds are still there. Similarly, whenever the mind goes through difficult times: conflicts, tensions, anxiety and stress, practise meditation and you will find relief. It will make the surface of the mind tranquil and peaceful. However, the seeds of karma, the weeds of karma, are deep-rooted and cannot be uprooted through meditation alone.

For this, the central theme in yoga and in other spiritual philosophies is karma yoga. I am not talking about the type of karma yoga that we perform in the ashram or in society. When you associate the word 'yoga' with karma, it takes on a different meaning altogether. It indicates a process, a state in which you are the master of your karma and not a subject of your karma. When you are the master of karma, you become a karma yogi. When you are under the influence of karma, you are subject to karma.

This was the message that Krishna gave to Arjuna, and through Arjuna to all of us. In order to transform and

harmonize life, in order to understand the secrets of life, in order to understand your relationship with other beings and with the universe, with the cosmos, with creation and with God, you need to understand how you interact with the karmas. It is a very simple thought that Krishna conveyed, yet it is one of the most difficult to understand.

Love and compassion

Another theme in the teachings of Krishna is never to be under stress. Krishna was a compassionate person. No other person in history has been as compassionate: not Buddha, not Christ. There is a story that Krishna had 16,000 wives. Some people even joke about it and say he was the biggest playboy the earth has ever seen. However, which society, whether past or present, would allow a person to declare, “I have 16,000 wives,” and for those 16,000 wives to accept one husband?

The story is that these women were kidnapped by a king and liberated by Krishna. In eastern society and also in western society the belief is that marriages are made in heaven. When people have been kidnapped and kept in bondage in another kingdom by another king, their purity and chastity will definitely be doubted. When Krishna liberated the women he knew they would be rejected by their society, families and friends upon their return home, as they were no longer pure, so he married all of them. Did he marry out of passion or out of compassion?

Society accepted this, for they knew that Krishna’s love was not physical or carnal. His character was such that people knew he was providing shelter and support. Krishna himself had eight wives to whom he was legally married, and he provided social protection for the 16,000 wives so that they would be able to live in dignity. Krishna radiated love. When we speak of love we always think of carnal, physical love; however, love does not mean a physical relationship. These are very gross definitions of love. Real love is transcendental.

Radha was supposed to be Krishna's lover. She was many years older than he was and married to someone else, yet today we do not remember the names of Krishna's other wives. In India, songs of love are dedicated to Radha and Krishna to show respect for the love that existed between them. We bow our heads to that idea, that belief, that philosophy. Why go back so far? Read the story of Mira; she was born a few hundred years ago. Her love for Krishna was so intense that at the time of her death, her physical body dissolved into the statue of Krishna. She did not die a physical death as we do. The force of her love was such that her physical body merged with the statue of Krishna. Can we call this physical love? Can we understand such an expression of love? No, we cannot; yet, when we hear about it, we respect it and bow our heads in reverence. Such love is definitely transcendental.

Krishna's teachings were to develop transcendental love and to be involved with karma. If we can understand these two concepts, we will find that many of our doubts about life, spirituality and dharma can be clarified. Today, on Krishna Janmashtami, we celebrate the birthday of this extraordinary child who was later recognized as an avatara. We also acknowledge the teachings we have received from this extraordinary person, and we take a *sankalpa* or resolve, if not to work upon, at least to understand the teachings, the guidelines and the path which has been shown to us through inspirational and uplifting examples from his life.

—Janmashtami, 3 September 1999

What does BYB expect of students on completion of their course?

Your purpose in coming here is to learn yoga. You may believe that yoga is good for the body or the mind, or for earning money and providing an employment opportunity. You may want to develop your personal skills as a yoga teacher and believe you should only concern yourself with

that aspect. Bihar Yoga Bharati is an institute where yoga is taught, that is all. You have to improve your aspirations through yoga. Therefore, whatever your aspirations are, make sure you are committed, dedicated and devoted to learning yoga. As an institute, this is the expectation of BYB.

There is another dimension, which is the spirit behind BYB. The spirit is the sankalpa of many generations, starting with Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, our grandfather guru. He had a mission and a vision. The mission was to introduce people to the divine life, which is at the opposite end of the spectrum to material life. We all live in the material world with a material mentality. We all have aspirations and desires, no matter how ridiculous or sublime they may be. However, the definite aim of all our desires and aspirations in material life is to achieve fulfilment, satisfaction, happiness or joy in whatever type of life we lead.

Swami Sivananda said that material life is only one end of the spectrum; the other is divine life. The journey of a human being, the evolution of human consciousness, is from the material to the divine, the transcendental. In order to experience completeness or wholeness in life, it is necessary to live healthily and happily in both the material world as well as the spiritual. Just as a bird cannot fly with only one wing, similarly, it is important for a human being who wishes to express wholeness, completeness and fulfilment, the final achievement in human life, to find harmony and balance in both material and spiritual life. Only then can we be truly fulfilled, happy, secure and joyous. This was the mission and the vision of Swami Sivananda.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, also had a mission and a vision. The mission was to propagate yoga. He had certain experiences and realizations about human nature, the human mind, the direction that human society is taking and the aim of life. He found that the most practical and philosophical undertaking that a person could take was yoga. Religions provide philosophical guidelines, yet the training,

teaching and wisdom needed to convert that philosophy into practice, into a process that can lead towards fulfilment and wholeness, was lacking. Yoga provided a practical method by which one could attain certain basic disciplines in life in order to experience the wholeness of the human personality.

Swami Satyananda made the propagation of yoga his mission due to his understanding of human nature, and also the mandate given to him by his guru. He had the vision that with the practice of yoga, one can develop understanding. Understanding is the greatest human quality. If there is any human quality we can define as the link between the transcendental and the mundane, it is not kindness, compassion or love, it is not being good and doing good; it is only understanding.

This understanding plays many different roles. It can be practical and material, spiritual and philosophical, or intellectual, rational, and intuitive. Understanding means that we know the reality in terms of cause and effect, right and wrong, good and bad, positive and negative. This knowledge is understanding. It is not intellectual knowledge; rather, it is understanding and living the knowledge. To develop understanding is the greatest human endeavour and effort. To awaken this faculty of understanding through the practices of yoga was the vision of Swami Satyananda.

BYB is guided by these visions. Not only BYB, but the entire yoga movement established by Swami Satyananda aims at only one point, one idea, one belief, one understanding. If you take it personally, begin to understand yourself, to adjust and adapt, and to live in accordance with the principles of dharma. Think in a dharmic, uplifting, enriching and positive way. This is understanding.

If you take it socially, live according to those principles which make you a light in society. Why live like an ordinary insect that cares for nothing but personal gratification and fulfilment? God has given us a very powerful tool, which is the quality of discriminative intelligence, *viveka buddhi*. You may call it a blessing, grace, benediction, *kripa*. No other life

form has buddhi, the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, to know the difference between day and night, to realize truth and untruth. This is God's greatest gift to us as human beings. Let us utilize it in the right way.

The right way becomes known after we begin to understand ourselves, our environment, our mentality, the tribe to which we belong, our true nature, the identity we adopt, and also, ultimately, ourselves as human beings. We are not human beings. We represent a particular social conditioning, whether it is Indian, American, Chinese, Japanese, English or Australian. This conditioning is the samskara. Our concept of right and wrong, good and bad, etiquette and non-etiquette, comes from the conditioning to which we belong.

We have never utilized our human qualities and abilities. I have seen people who are totally devoid of the basic quality of understanding profess compassion, love and kindness. How can they do it? They are leading us in the wrong direction. They have no right and they do not have wisdom.

All great people who have been identified as lights of human society, whether it be Shankaracharya, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, Mahavira, Swami Sivananda or Saint Francis of Assisi, have developed one important and great spiritual quality. That quality is understanding. It is due to this understanding that they have interacted with love, compassion, kindness, beauty, simplicity, innocence and purity. Having this ability to understand one's self, the environment, society, the national and the global human mentality has been the vision of Swami Satyananda, attainable through the practices of yoga.

These are the visions and inspiration guiding the entire yoga movement established and created by Swami Satyananda. We may not have been aware of it, either as yoga students or even as sannyasins; however, today I am telling each and every one who is here, whether new or long-term, that the environment of Ganga Darshan and the teaching imparted here, whether in the form of classroom training

in yoga or philosophy, or in satsang, or through actions, has one aim.

Each person who comes here is a unique character, with their own way of thinking, believing and living, their own perceptions and ideas. Therefore, we do not discourage unusual behaviour here. Each sannyasin should think of himself or herself as a cartoon character and each person who comes here, student or visitor, as a character who plays a role in their cartoon. If you think in this way, at least you will learn not to take things personally. Then you will begin to see the joy and beauty that life has to offer. This applies to everyone.

Only when we begin to take things too personally, do we become involved in *raga* and *dvesha*, pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering. Why not pass the time just as you pass your night asleep and your day awake? If you sleep during the day, you will have a headache and if you stay up all night, you will feel very lonely; therefore, it is better to spend the day awake and the night asleep. Similarly, it is better to take both the good and the bad of life in your stride. When you learn how to do this, that is the fulfilment of life.

This is what BYB expects from all of you, whether you come here for a day, four months, two years or a lifetime. We expect and wish to see this growth in you, and I believe that you agree with me.

—23 September 1999

Who is the drashta?

In each one of us here is a person observing what the body and the mind are doing. This person is neither male nor female; it is the consciousness known as *chitta*. Our training is total involvement with the senses, and with this kind of training it is not possible to become aware of the *drashta*, the witness. To become the *drashta*, to know the aspect of yourself that is the observer, you have to retrain yourself completely. The process of retraining is defined by yoga as control of the modifications of the mind, *chitta vritti nirodhah*.

Only when the vrittis are contained can one identify or realize the drashta.

The drashta, the observer, is not the part of yourself that says, “I will watch what I am doing.” There are two factors. One is the mind, which also has the ability to observe, to become a witness. The other is the drashta, the inner mind. When we are doing our meditation, we tell ourselves we are going to observe our thoughts, the interaction of the senses, what is happening in our body and mind. Here we are using the ability of the mind to observe itself. This is the initial stage of awareness, and most people are at this level; however, the real drashta does not live in the mind.

The real drashta is the spirit. This can be explained in the following way. You have a car, which is the body. There is a driver, which is the mind, and a passenger, which is the spirit. The passenger does not drive the car. The car cannot move without the driver. The mind drives the body and is responsible for applying the gears, brake, accelerator, clutch and steering wheel. If the driver says, “I will become aware of the driving”, then it is the mind saying, “I will become aware of myself.” That is one level of drashta. This level of drashta stays with you until you reach dharana.

After you have gone beyond pratyahara and dharana, the real drashta emerges in dhyana and in samadhi. At that point you can say the passenger is aware that the car is moving and that the driver is now applying the brakes, and so on. The aware passenger becomes the witness of everything that is happening, and also becomes the guide for the driver.

Generally, when you take a taxi, you give the address to the driver, but you have no idea of the route. The driver can take you there the short way or the long way. That is your situation now. You tell your mind, “Look, this is the address I want to go to, take me there.” The mind takes you either the short way or the long way. Sometimes the route is very long and you spend your life wandering through a maze. Sometimes the route is very short and suddenly you realize

that you are there. In normal life, it is the mind that takes the lead. Beyond dharana, in dhyana and samadhi, the passenger says, “I know that you are taking me by the long route, but my desire is to go by the short route. I know the route. We’ll go this way.” That is the real drashta, the spirit.

—17 December 1999

What are the important qualities of a yoga teacher? How can yoga teachers imbibe the spirit of Satyananda Yoga?

First, we have to realize what yoga is and how the teacher uses it. Today there are many yoga teachers around the world. Even though these teachers may have a personal or commercial reason for teaching yoga, all adopt a particular method. Some teach postures only, some teach meditation only, some teach yoga as a philosophy, or as ritual. The concept they have developed is according to their training and understanding. However, there is another dimension to yoga, which is recognition of the human nature.

It is the whole personality, body, mind, emotions and spirit that need to be catered to through the practices of yoga. If you teach yoga only for the body, it becomes part of physical training, physical culture, physical exercise, which is incomplete. The body is not isolated from the mind, or from the emotions, or from the spirit. Similarly, if you teach meditation as you feel it is more important than the practice of asana, then again you have to understand that the mind does not exist alone, but is supported by the body, by the emotions and by the spirit. Therefore, a balanced sequence or series of yoga practices involves something for the body, something for the mind, something for the emotions and something for the spirit.

Out of all the different traditions in the world, the Satyananda Yoga or Bihar Yoga tradition aims at integrating the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of yoga in one practice. That is what we recognize today as the Satyananda Yoga or the Bihar Yoga systems.

The physical exercises can be learnt anywhere. Nowadays there are hundreds of books, audio and video aids from which to learn meditation, yet what has been the actual gain so far? There are many people who practise meditation without following the set procedure of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, as specified in raja yoga. People tend to believe that dhyana is important and that pratyahara and dharana are unimportant. When they practise *dhyana*, meditation, they have bypassed two other aspects of their mind. These aspects of mind become active and distract the concentration. Later the practitioner feels that his or her meditation is not leading anywhere because of distractions, disturbances and too many confrontations.

The first quality of a yoga teacher should therefore be to recognize the needs of the human nature and personality, to be able to look at a person as a combination of head, heart and hands; body, mind, emotions and spirit. The second quality of a yoga teacher is to follow the prescribed procedure, and not jump from one technique to another, thinking that some part of the procedure is irrelevant. These two qualities or understandings make a good teacher and the rest evolves from there.

As a teacher, one has to make an attempt to understand the needs of the aspirant. There are some common needs. Physical health, mental wellbeing, emotional harmony, intellectual clarity and spiritual development are the needs of every individual in the world. You cannot say that physical health is not your requirement. People think of yoga as something physical when they are suffering; however, by then it is too late because yoga is not a therapy, although it is used as therapy. The main intention of yoga is not curative but promotive and preventative. With the promotion of health and the prevention of imbalances and illnesses, one is able to attain good health, mental peace, intellectual sharpness and emotional harmony. These aspects are the need of every individual today, so the teaching of yoga should evolve around the fulfilment of these needs.

Keep in your shop the items that are needed and not the items that you wish to sell. If what you wish to sell is not needed, it is simply going to gather dust. However, if you stock items that are needed, which may not be your choice but which are everyone else's choice, then you are going to clear your stock very fast. That has been our experience with yoga as well. We have seen that if there is a balanced set of practices, covering all the aspects of personality, then people derive greater benefit from the yoga practice and can understand yoga in a better way.

—22 December 1999

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a time to celebrate two things: one is the birth of Jesus and the other is the dawn of Christ consciousness. Jesus was a person and Christ consciousness was the spirit that descended. You are a person, you have a body, you are limited and restricted by the senses and the mind; yet, at the same time there is the life-force, vitality and dynamism, which physically or externally is recognized as spirit, and which in esoteric terminology is recognized as the divine consciousness or Christ consciousness.

Just as there is a maturity or evolution of the physical body, from birth to adulthood to old age to death, similarly there is an evolution of consciousness. This evolution of consciousness culminates as Christ consciousness. Christ consciousness is the consciousness that is in communion with the divine nature, the consciousness that is united, not fractured. At present the consciousness is fractured, in the sense that we have no concept or awareness of what is happening on our unconscious level. We have a very basic understanding of the subconscious level and we have a partial understanding of the conscious level. Therefore, our consciousness is fractured or broken. However, there is another consciousness that is unified, which yogis

have recognized as the turiya state. *Turiya* is the unified consciousness.

Christ consciousness and the turiya state

The Christ consciousness of Christianity and the turiya consciousness of yoga are the same. This consciousness is the actual form of the spirit. What is spirit anyway? What is the difference between spirit and consciousness? They are manifestations of the same force and energy. When the water in a lake is turbulent it loses clarity, whereas when the water becomes quiet you can see every reflection in it. The fractured consciousness is the turbulent water, in which you are simply groping around without seeing anything clearly. The still water, in which everything is reflected, is the turiya state, or the Christ state.

Today we are made aware of two important events: the birth of Jesus, who was recognized as the son of Mary and Joseph, and the dawning of Christ consciousness, or the state of turiya, which is recognized as the concept of the son of God – *Ishwara ansha jiva avinashi*. The understanding of the son of God is stated in the *Ramayana*, it is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*; it is stated in all the literature dealing with spiritual life. We have to connect with this unified spirit. People do it in different ways and forms. It is like saying, “All roads lead to Rome” – ‘roads’ is plural, not singular. The road is decided for everybody from their point of evolution in life.

Journey to the spirit

I am not speaking on Christian theology; rather, I am explaining the spiritual dimensions of the spirit. The evolution of spirit is not a one-time process; it is an ongoing journey. The journey ends only when we have reached our destination. At first, one cannot experience consciousness; one can only experience the manifest side of consciousness, which is the mind. One has to work through the mind, one has to purify and transform the mind to have a vision

of consciousness. Mind is the first barrier that has to be overcome.

Until now, we have not been able to realize the consciousness. While psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts speak of the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious, in reality these terms do not mean anything, as the conscious, subconscious and unconscious that they speak about relates to the conscious mind, the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind. Therefore, when we say, “I am conscious,” it does not mean anything; it is a flight of fancy.

The term ‘consciousness’ relates to the knowledge and experience of the inner nature or *swabhava*. The term ‘mind’ relates to the aspect of consciousness which is interacting in creation. The greater *manas* (rational mind), the greater *chitta* (storehouse of memories), the greater *ahamkara* (ego), the greater *buddhi* (intelligence) are parts of consciousness, just as the arms, legs and head are parts of the body and have no function in isolation. If you remove the head from the body, what will happen? If you remove the arms or legs from the body, what will happen? If you remove the body from the body, what will happen? Although the parts are recognized independently, they do not have any independent function. Similarly, although the mind is recognized as an extension, as the manifest side of consciousness, we cannot perceive the real consciousness, the *swabhava*, the inner nature, until we have worked through the mind. Therefore, in all the traditions of the past, the thinking that evolved was to see and experience the relationship of the mind with the world, and the expression of the mind in the world, and to transform this expression, this quality of mind, to realize the *swabhava*, the inner nature, the consciousness.

Discovering the link between consciousness and spirit

Once consciousness is identified as the nature of creation, then the link is discovered. The essence is discovered within consciousness, and that essence is the divine essence.

There is a difference between the water in an ocean and the water in a river or lake. Ocean water has a different quality from river water, although both are H_2O . In each location the quality of the H_2O is different. Why are oceans salty? Where did the salt come from? Why aren't lakes and rivers salty? Why this difference when the other components of water are the same? If you can find the reason, you also have the answers to life.

The link between consciousness and spirit is recognized as the essence: H_2O . The essence is there, but in association with different objects of creation: time, space and object, the perception of spirit and the perception of consciousness have changed. Only a few people in this world, through their effort, have been able to realize the consciousness, and out of those few, some have experienced the divine consciousness.

We belong to the first category of people who are struggling with the mind, struggling to transform its perceptions and expressions, struggling to find harmony or balance between the mind and the heart: *buddhi* and *bhavana*, logic and feeling. That is our level. Those people who have gone beyond the mind say that logic does not exist beyond the mind, only feeling exists. Consciousness is the realm of feelings, but not the feelings of joy, happiness, love, compassion and peace that you experience through your mind. The feeling of consciousness is of a different variety, which cannot be explained or defined. The feelings that we express are an indication, a glimpse in miniature of the actual experience. Once that transformative, transcendental feeling is experienced, each and every cell and atom of the body becomes realized, each and every cell and atom of the body becomes light.

In spiritual life, there comes a time when we have to call it a day, and we can only do so when we have reached our destination. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have many miles to go before I sleep." This indicates the journey of spirit: from mind to consciousness, to realization of the universal connection. This universal connection is the

connection of Christ consciousness, the connection of the turiya state of being.

Sadhana to transform the mind

Christ was born two thousand years ago. Why do we still remember him this day? It is not because Christ was the founder of Christianity. Christianity was established in Rome, not in Bethlehem or Jerusalem. The founder of the organized Christian system was St Peter. The teaching of Christ, of Jesus, before the establishment of Christianity was very simple. If we were to express Christ's teaching in the language of today, we would say, "Live for others, to alleviate the suffering of others and to reconnect them with their source, God." This would be Christ's teaching in a nutshell, and it is the most important one to transform the human mind.

Who lives for other people? Today we are so self-centred that we forget about the suffering of others; we are too caught up in our own conflicts and problems. To connect with God, the source, becomes a distant reality in our lives. However, if we can conceive of a process to fulfil these three important mandates of Christ, we become true Christians in heart and in spirit; we become true yogis in heart and in spirit; we become true human beings in action and in thought. This has to be the form of our sadhana in order to humanize ourselves.

Spirit is beyond the mind

We call ourselves human, but it is only a social label. In reality we are different. What are the qualities of a human being? What determines that we are human beings? Thinking is not a quality of a human being; thinking is a process of the intellect, intelligence. The intellect does not define a human being, for the same intellect, when used in the wrong manner, can make us satanic.

The thing that makes us really human is the knowledge of the connection, the invisible thread that exists, connecting

the individual and the transcendental, the divine. It is the ability to see this link, this connection, in everything, in everyone else, and the destruction of the thought that 'I am superior' or 'I am inferior', 'I know more' or 'I know less', for these are all plays of the ego. If I feel superior, it is my ego playing with me. If I feel inferior, it is my ego playing with me. If I consider myself to be knowledgeable, it is my ego. If I consider myself to be foolish, it is my ego. In relation to what is one foolish? In relation to what is one knowledgeable? Is a PhD degree an indication of your knowledge, just because you have crammed your head with many different ideas and concepts, some of which are very fulfilling and enriching and some of which are not so fulfilling and enriching?

Human experience is beyond ego. You have to understand this concept in terms of mind, consciousness and spirit. Intellect, knowledge and perception all relate to the dimension of mind. Your understanding of yourself, of who you are, relates to the dimension of mind. However, the mind has to die for consciousness to take birth. Jesus had to die for Christ to emerge. Jesus died on the cross and after three days Christ emerged from the cave. It was that Christ who ascended to heaven. Jesus did not ascend to heaven; Christ ascended to heaven. The mind that relates to the world has to die and consciousness has to emerge. Therefore, no amount of wisdom, knowledge, intelligence or personal awareness is going to lead us to the experience of consciousness or spirit. Once you realize the spirit, then spirit is recognized as one.

Universal connection

Of the five elements in this world, there is one that connects each individual with another individual. That element is air. Who knows? Maybe the air that we are breathing in at this moment is the same air exhaled by Christ two thousand years ago. Maybe it is the same air exhaled by Krishna five thousand years ago. It is this air that is connecting us

together, globally; and just as in this dimension air is the connecting agent, in another higher dimension, spirit is the connecting agent.

We think of spirit as something unique to each one. Maybe it is just like our ability to breathe in. How we breathe is unique to each one of us, but air is universal. Similarly, our experience of spirit can be individual, but it is a universal connection. Hence, the statements, “My Father and I are One”, or *Aham Brahmasmi* – “I am that universal spirit”, meaning that the individual ‘I’ and the universal spirit, the spirit which I am experiencing within me and the spirit which surrounds the entire manifest and unmanifest creation, are one. These are the statements of people who have had a vision of the spirit.

As part of our sadhana in life, we have to make an attempt, maybe not immediately but in the course of time, to transcend the mind. The mind is the force which limits our expressions, which restricts our ability to participate in life in a homogeneous, integrated, evolving manner. It is due to this restriction, which is a bondage of *maya*, creation, the third dimensional force, that we are aware of ourselves as individuals. It is *maya* which makes us realize our uniqueness; however, this same *maya* is like the covering over a light bulb.

The stories in the Bible are yogic and tantric concepts. The opening of the seven doors, the removal of the seven veils refers to the opening of the seven chakras. As each veil is removed, as each door is opened, greater light shines through. If you cover a 1,000 watt halogen lamp with seven bed sheets, one after another, what intensity or luminosity of light will you see? In order to see the light as it is, you have to remove the coverings. The coverings or veils that have been referred to in the Bible refer to the chakras. You have to open the chakras, and then in sahasrara you experience the pure light. This is only one example of the teachings given in the Bible. These examples indicate the process of tantra and the process of yoga.

Develop simplicity, innocence, clarity and compassion

Jesus was familiar with the processes of yoga and tantra. People are only slowly realizing the depth of the Christian teachings. They are *bhakti*, devotion, and moral values, inter-mixed with yogic and tantric concepts in such a way that they represent the spiritual dimension of human transformation achieved by following the path of devotion, and the building up of human character. Jesus taught yoga and tantra, not in the form of asana, pranayama, yoga nidra and meditation, but as a method to know that the higher reality exists within.

Any teaching conveys two ideas: the aim which you have to follow and the process or method you can adopt to reach the aim. If you speak of the aim without the process, it is philosophy. If you speak of the process without the aim, it is a system. However, when you unite both it becomes sadhana, the transformative process. In the teachings of Christ we see the sadhana; yet, he spoke in a very simple language. In his time, people were not travelling around the world with university degrees and diplomas. People then were very innocent and simple. Therefore, Christ spoke to them in their language and inspired them to develop simplicity, innocence, clarity of thought and compassion for others. In today's context, we need to understand these concepts in relation to our present situation in life. When we try to do this it is yoga, the process that leads to union.

My intention is not to talk about the history of Christianity, but to realize the spirit with which we need to connect in order to become true humans. Only then will our shortcomings, faults and sins be washed away. As long as we are not true humans, we shall have to carry the burden of the cross, and it is heavy. We have to become aware of our life and see how much luggage we are carrying with us: our insecurities, fears, complexes, inhibitions, desires, attachments, and all the other expressions of the mind which matter to us, such as hatred, anger, jealousy and frustration. All these things do matter to us, don't they? Therefore, we are carrying a burden on our shoulders and it seems that

pile keeps on increasing day by day. People say, “Christ died on the cross for our sins.” Yes, these are our sins. These are the sins against humanism. He died to make us aware that a determined effort has to be made to lift from our back the weight that we are carrying in our rucksack.

Prioritize your spiritual life

Tonight, when you go to your room, do not go to sleep. Instead, reflect for ten or fifteen minutes and set priorities for your spiritual life. Just as you set priorities for your material life to fulfil your aspirations and desires, set priorities for your spiritual life. What do you wish to see in yourself? Do not think about the highest in life; it is not possible. Do not think of acquiring the sun; it is not possible. The nearer you come to the sun, the hotter it becomes, until eventually you are burnt out, in such a way that no trace remains; all the atoms of the body are consumed.

Set your priorities for your spiritual life. I won't give you any suggestions; you have to find out for yourself. Each one of you should set a priority today that becomes not an impossible aim but an achievable aim. Do not even go into abstract concepts such as, 'I'll be a good person.' Good in relation to what? Just as time is relative, good and bad are also relative. Think of something definite that you can aspire for, hope for and achieve in the course of your life. Remember to try and understand spirituality from a practical point of view, for real spiritual life alters the material.

You have to think about and reflect on the spiritual journey that you desire to embark upon, and that many of you think you have embarked upon, from a very down-to-earth perspective, without too many philosophical fantasies. Once you have decided, “Okay, this is the first step in my spiritual life,” then you can lie down and go to sleep. If you want to connect with the spirit of Christmas, do this. For Christians it is Christmas time and for yogis it is turiya time.

—24 December 1999

2000

What is the meaning and significance of yajna in our spiritual lives?

What is the relevance of anything in life? Anything and everything that is auspicious and beneficial, either for the body, the mind, the spirit, the environment or society, is relevant in life. Anything that is auspicious and beneficial, not only for oneself but for others and for a greater purpose, becomes a part of our life, our thinking process, attitude, behaviour and understanding.

Yajna is the exoteric aspect of the process of change that you are developing internally. In order to encourage yajna, the yamas and niyamas of yoga are relevant. Mouna at mealtimes is relevant in an ashram. Mouna has no meaning if you do not adhere to it. Discipline has no meaning if you do not adhere to it. Similarly, yajna has no meaning if you do not adhere to the process involved in it. When you adhere to and go deep into these things, they have a meaning and everything is relevant. When you say, “This is irrelevant,” it means it does not apply to you at the present time.

The common meaning of yajna is a process of transformation. Yajna is not only a fire ceremony; it is also related to one’s life. You should think of life as a yajna. You should see your life as a yajna. What is offered in a yajna? The right, pure, unadulterated oblation, whether it be grains, fruit, nuts, or other samagri. One of the prerequisites of a yajna

is that everything should be pure and unadulterated. The outer ritual has no meaning if your thoughts, feelings and actions are adulterated. You can practise hundreds of fire ceremonies, yet what is the purpose of it all if you are not aware of your basic nature and self?

Society believes that things have to be done on the outside and not within. Everyone thinks that an external ritual is going to help them improve; however, it cannot and it will not. We know that Ganges water is considered to be purificatory. If you fill a bottle with urine, plug it and put it in the Ganga, it can stay there for many years. When you reopen the bottle later, the urine will still be urine; it will not have purified. Similarly, our personality, mentality, attitudes and perceptions are all put inside a bottle and plugged; nobody should touch it. Then we expose ourselves to an external ritual and for some time we feel good, happy, wonderful, fantastic: good vibes, good energy. What does it mean? What did you gain from it? Positive vibrations do not mean anything unless and until they become a part of you. In order to make something that is beneficial and auspicious a part of you, you have to bring about a change from within.

It is not the yajna that is important; it is you. If your appreciation is intellectual, it has no meaning. For a person who is not a jeweller, a diamond is of no value; it is just a clear rock. You may say, "This is a diamond," yet you will not know how to differentiate between a diamond, a crystal and a piece of glass. In order to know the difference, you need to have some understanding of the quality and usefulness of these different items. Therefore, the important person is you, not the external ritual, the discipline or the external event.

The change has to come from within. If you are able to bring about that change, I will not need to answer any questions at all. If you are not able to appreciate your role in the development of your life, then there is no end to questions, and the answers you get will have no meaning for you; they will be just another event. "Ah, it was a good

answer, but what did it mean?" "Oh, he spoke very well, but I don't know how to relate it to my life." With this kind of mentality it is difficult to understand the spiritual dimension that governs each and every individual.

Different religions and philosophies tell us that there are some thoughts, actions and perceptions in life that act with the support, force, strength and energy of belief and trust, and there are other things that are guided by the force of the intellect. Those events that are guided by the intellect are understandable and clear. However, if you try to convert a process that is being directed, guided and motivated by trust and belief into intellectual understanding, you are going to mess it up, as you do not have the ability to understand it.

Human beings tend to use the intellect in relation to external events, not to themselves personally. When it comes to yourself you say, "I feel," "I believe," but when it comes to something else, you say, "I want to know!" Why can't you say at that time, "I can experience"? Why do you have to say, "I want to know"? When it relates to yourself, you say, "I feel and my feeling is appropriate, my feeling is right; I know my feeling can't be wrong." Can you justify that feeling through the intellect? No, you can't. It is a conviction and that conviction, that belief and that trust is part of you. Knowledge is not part of you; it comes from outside. Some aspects of knowledge are uniformly distributed in every individual, yet other forms of knowledge, which are not usually within the grasp of an individual, are not contained within; you have to search for it.

Become aware of yourself and see your life as a yajna, as an event of transformation that happens constantly, no matter what situation you are in. I have not come across a single situation that I can say is not a part of the yajna of life. Negativity is part of the yajna of life, happiness is part of the yajna of life, as they are the result of our actions, of the situations in which we find ourselves, of how we perform, think and act. We are sick because we think we are sick, we are happy because we think we are happy and we are sad

because we think we are sad. We put on these different masks and then we look at ourselves in the mirror every day wearing that mask.

When we are happy, it is because of a sense of fulfilment, attainment and contentment. When we are distressed, it is because there is a lack of fulfilment and contentment. What is fulfilment? Is it something definable that can be uniformly applied to everybody? No. Just as you cannot define fulfilment, similarly, you cannot define yajna. You have to experience it, to feel it, to believe in it, as it is the fusion of your energy with the energy of the event that makes it a process of transformation. This applies not only to yajna but to every situation in life.

Some students who come here think that as their course is over and they are leaving soon, they no longer need to keep mouna. If that is the case, you will be the loser, for you are separating yourself from something which you see as an external discipline, but which is there to improve your nature and mind. If you believe in improving, follow the disciplines, and if you do not believe in improving, don't stay here. That is one example of what we believe in and how we act.

Similarly, a yajna is a process of believing and acting. When belief and action become harmonious, then life becomes a yajna where right actions, right thoughts, right speech and right behaviour are offered as oblations in the fire of spirit, and an inner, psychic, spiritual unfoldment and transformation takes place. Therefore, rather than trying to discover the exoteric meaning, try to feel and understand the esoteric meaning that is being conveyed, then you will be the winner. This is the vision that yoga tries to give.

There will always be external differences. Where there are two pots there is bound to be noise. In the kitchen there is noise when you shift one pot, so when there are three hundred pots in one place there is bound to be noise. However, each pot has to realize that it has a specific role to play. A spoon cannot fulfil the role of a cauldron and a cauldron cannot fulfil the role of a cup. The role is defined.

Similarly, the role of every action and every thought in life is defined. You may not understand or appreciate it now, but if you think rationally, logically, intuitively, you will begin to see a link connecting the external you and the inner you.

It is becoming aware of that connection between the external you and the inner you that is the purpose, not only of yoga but of the whole of life. Yogis have viewed every interaction in life as an event leading to greater realization, harmony and understanding. Remember that you are the centre, and if you open yourself up and don't keep yourself bottled up, lost in imagination and fantasies of 'this is beautiful and that is ugly', 'this is right and that is wrong', then the eye of wisdom opens up. This eye of wisdom is awakened by opening ourselves.

It doesn't matter if a bottle is full of urine. If the cap is not on, after some time in the Ganges river the urine will have gone and the bottle will be filled with Ganges water. However, if the cap is on, then that closed bottle can lie on the river bed for thousands of years. The river may dry up but the stink in the bottle will remain. You have to decide if you want to be a closed bottle or an open bottle.

It is easy to become a guru yet difficult to become a disciple. Gurudom is easily attained, whereas to live like a disciple is a near impossibility. To live as a disciple one always has to struggle with the mind, the ambitions of the mind and the ego. Real discipleship needs a person who is totally open, empty, free; and this is not possible.

Another definition of a disciple, if the first one is not attainable, is one who is ready to learn and does not say, "I know, I know." One who is ready to listen and does not say, "I know what you are going to say, you don't have to tell me." One who is ready to learn all the time, even if it is the same thing twenty times over, with the same keenness as if it were the first time. That is one quality of a disciple, and possibly the most important and valid one.

That is how I have tried to mould my life in every matter: philosophical, spiritual, administrative, or social.

It is a different mentality; it is the willingness to learn, not to know. After knowing something once, you think you know everything. It is like saying that once you have seen one, you have seen them all. Normal people think this way, but disciples think in another way. Even if you encounter the same situation, the same person, the same knowledge, the same event a million times, do not allow the ego to say, “I know”, because the moment you say, “I know” there is a psychological block, a barrier in the process of learning. This psychological barrier is the beginning of the downfall of human consciousness. Ego restricts, inhibits and suppresses creativity. “I know” suppresses creativity. “I will learn” enhances creativity. It is a question of choosing between the two.

—24 January 2000

YOGA: A WAY OF LIFE

Whilst yoga has undergone changes in understanding, the tradition of yoga itself has not changed. Today we are still doing the same practices as Sage Patanjali, without any modifications. We are still doing the same hatha yoga practices that sages Gorakhnath, Matsyendranath, Swatmarama and the literature talk about as they were practised thousands of years ago. The only change that has taken place is in our way of living, our way of knowing and perceiving things. If yoga practitioners thousands of years ago used to live in mud huts, today the yoga practitioner lives in a house or apartment in Manhattan, Sydney, London, Rome or Moscow.

Yoga has not changed, the tradition is the same; only the way of understanding it has changed. What in the past was known subjectively through experience, we can know today through scientific means. If a person was ill, practised an asana, felt better and found that eventually the illness disappeared, it was a subjective experience, and the person

said, “For this illness, this asana is beneficial.” If you do the same thing today, the result will be the same, as the condition of the human body is the same and the asana is the same. However, today we can also verify the results using scientific methodology, therefore our appreciation has changed.

Levels of knowing yoga

There are different levels of knowing yoga. The first is the ordinary yoga practitioner who learns from any yoga teacher, in any centre, school or ashram, returns home and is satisfied with practising yoga for limbering and toning up the body.

The second level is developing some affinity with yoga, wanting to go deeper into the practices, so you become known as a novice or sadhaka. If kundalini yoga attracts you, you may decide to try all the practices to awaken your kundalini, go and live in an ashram, and develop some form of affinity with yoga. Or you may take a book, go to a farm or a community and do your practices there, in retreat, in seclusion. That is the novice yoga sadhaka.

The third level of yoga is experimentation. You experiment with the changes that you feel and experience through yoga. When you practise yoga, you find you relax, you feel better, more optimism or pessimism is experienced, or more awareness comes, or more depression, or more anxiety. These are the experiences that can guide one further into the investigative process of yoga. Either you investigate it subjectively, alone or in a group, or you investigate in it a laboratory with instruments, with knowledgeable people whose expertise you can rely on. In this way, another step is experimenting with the change and trying to understand the change that is happening when you do a practice.

Another level beyond that is going into a tradition and seeing the relevance of yoga from the beginning until the present, and seeing yourself as a part of that stream of thought. There have been many such household yoga teachers. BKS Iyengar is not a sannyasin, yet his entire

life is devoted to the propagation of yoga. Dr Nagendra from Vivekananda Kendra is not a sannyasin, yet his whole life is devoted to yoga. I am talking here of the yogic traditions, not of the sannyasa traditions. Deshikacharya, T. Krishnamacharya and Iyengar represent a tradition of yoga. People such as Swami Abhedananda and Swami Vivekananda represent another tradition of yoga. The tradition of Babaji, Sri Yukteshwara, Lahiri Mahashaya and Paramahansa Yogananda is yet another tradition of yoga. There is the tradition that emanates from Swami Sivananda through Swami Satchidananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Satyananda, Swami Venkateshananda, Swami Chidananda, and others of the Sivananda lineage. There are many traditions of yoga and many people have made such traditions or paths a part of their lifestyle, profession and expression in life; and then there have been some who have made yoga into a sadhana.

Yoga as a sadhana

There are many people who live alone and practise yoga, who describe the whole process, who are exponents of yoga. Yoga is not only the practice of asana, pranayama, kriya and kundalini techniques, hatha yoga and shatkarma; it is also imbibing a way of life, improving the quality of life, as indicated in the yamas and niyamas.

What are the yamas and niyamas? They are the awareness of and adherence to certain qualities and ideas that can uplift the human mind, emotions, character, psyche and personality. You become and are recognized as being a good person. If you develop the quality of *ahimsa*, non-violence, you will emanate compassion. If you develop the quality of *satya*, truthfulness, you will emanate love. If you imbibe the quality of *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness, you will express simplicity and innocence. Each yama and each niyama will highlight a character of the human personality. When that character is highlighted then it becomes part of your expression, understanding, actions, behaviour, attitude

and life. Therefore, yoga is not only techniques; it is also a lifestyle, known as the yogic lifestyle.

Beyond being a lifestyle, yoga is also a philosophy of life that gives strength to your mental character; a hope to hold on to and a motivation to experience something better than what you have experienced until now. In this way, it becomes a philosophy as well. Therefore, yoga is a technique, a way of life and a philosophy. The underlying current of all these three aspects of yoga is the personal effort that one puts into the sadhana. The sadhana is a willingness to act.

What is action? When you do an asana, it is an action. When you wake up in the morning, it is an action. When you meditate, it is an action. When you are silent, it is an action. When you are engaged in any activity, you are in action. Passivity is also action. This has been the statement of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna tells Arjuna that action and inaction are two sides of the same coin. There is no such thing as inaction. When you are sitting silently, you are making an effort to sit silently. When you are enjoying nature and beauty, your perceptions are actively appreciating the beauty. You cannot say you are not doing anything; your senses and mind are involved. Even when you are in a state of depression you are still active: your thoughts are active, you are aware of the process that is taking place in the mind. Even when you sleep it is karma; it is an action that is being performed by the body, by you as a person. There is no inactivity. Therefore, if you think of karma as activity and inactivity, then there is no such thing as inactivity; life is nothing but one continuous karma. The underlying, connecting thread is the sadhana, the motivation to act.

Clarity of mind

If one follows the sadhana of yoga, there are great possibilities, provided one does not measure everything in terms of money and power. It seems that today, due to the environment, everybody thinks in terms of money and power. Yoga is not anti-money and power; yoga is pro-you.

It is not against materialism, for why renounce materialism? You can say it diverts the mind, yet who allows the mind to be diverted? If the mind is diverted, it means there is no mental clarity. If there is mental clarity, the mind will not be diverted. If you know where you have to go, then no matter how many stops you make on the way, you will be aware at every stop that you still have to go further.

You have to set a goal. You have to travel from this city to that city. You have looked at the map, you know where the good spots to stop are, but eventually you have to reach the city. Therefore, no matter where you stop, you will still want to continue moving forward. You do it as there is clarity in your life. If there is clarity, how can even materialism distract anybody? To obtain that clarity, *sadhana* is a must.

—27 January 2000

What is the yogic path that can help us surrender to the divine will?

Bhakti yoga is the only yoga that indicates the way to *Ishwara pranidhana*, letting go and surrender to the divine will. The path of bhakti is superior to karma yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, or any other yoga. All other yogas work at one level of the personality. Karma yoga will deal with action, performance, the expression of the senses or the intellect, and it will bring in the component of creativity. Raja yoga will enhance and deepen your awareness and perceptions. It will lead you towards becoming the *drashta*, the observer, and bring in the component of awareness. Hatha yoga will bring in the component of purity. Jnana yoga will bring in the component of applying wisdom, not just knowing but being ‘wisdom-ful’.

Only bhakti yoga works at the level of ego, removing the component of arrogance from ego, *ahamkara*, and surrendering to the divine will. Ego is the last thing in everyone’s life that has to be transformed and transcended. That is the last

barrier one has to cross. It will happen when the arrogance of the ego submits to the divine will, and that is the path of bhakti. Other yogas help you to cultivate a new idea, habit, perception or lifestyle. They help to cultivate a different you, where you are in harmony with yourself, nature and the divine, whereas bhakti yoga takes you to and makes you prostrate in front of God.

Once somebody left behind their cigarettes and lighter in Jyoti Mandir: they surrendered that habit. That is also a kind of offering you can make. The offering need not be of flowers and love all the time; the offering can be of a habit as well. By giving up a habit we are actually surrendering to the cosmic will. We are giving up a need, a dependency, and becoming more self-aware, more responsible for our health and wellbeing. We are connecting with our courage and strength. This is a miracle in which we have submitted a part of our conditioning which comes from the ego, and that is also bhakti.

— 5 September 2000

WELCOME TO BYB STUDENTS

Welcome to the new Certificate Course students. For those who have had no exposure to the ashram it will be a very strange and peculiar place. You are being exposed to three different environments. The first environment is the ashram, the second is yoga and the third is spiritual life. In the course of time, all three components can be experienced here.

Ashram vision

An ashram is a *gurukul*, the family of the guru, where one vision is maintained, the vision to enrich oneself in life. Ganga Darshan is a centre dedicated to yoga and it is composed of those people who, for a little while – whether one week, a month, a year – have a wish to experience and be devoted to the pursuit of this vision.

Not everybody is perfect in life; rather, everybody is striving to become better and closer to perfect than before, whatever their definition or concept of perfection. Everyone is subject to their own thoughts, beliefs, nature, attitudes and behaviour. Each one is making an attempt to become a part of that common vision according to their strengths. This common vision of the ashram is learning how to live a spiritual life, not by rejecting material life but by adjusting and being in harmony with it.

There are many who advocate renunciation, *tyaga*, yet is renunciation possible? Is real renunciation going from riches to rags, leaving the security and comfort of the home and going into solitude and seclusion? No, renunciation has to be an internal renunciation of the things that bind us, that hold us down to our present state of being. We are at that level of being where there has to be an adjustment between spiritual values and material existence. Incorporating spiritual values with material existence in education is where yoga comes in, in the ashram.

Yogic learning

Yoga is not only learning hatha yoga or becoming an adept in raja yoga. We don't hold a competition to see who can attain samadhi first or who can be in a meditative state for the longest period. Perfection in hatha yoga is perfection of one branch of yoga, not of yoga. Perfection in jnana yoga is perfection of one branch of yoga, not of yoga. Perfection in raja yoga is perfection of one branch of yoga; it is not 'the yoga'.

If we allow ourselves to become aware, these attempts at learning different branches of yoga open up different dimensions of experience and perception, which ultimately benefit us. It brings about learning that is not only an intellectual concept or idea; rather, it is something that becomes part of life, and which we call applied wisdom. Application of wisdom is the learning that comes through yoga. When yoga becomes part of your life, each expression,

each thought, each sentiment conveys that quality of applied wisdom. This is the aim of yoga that we try to pursue here.

For the Bihar Yoga tradition, perfection of a posture is necessary. At the same time, equal focus has to be given to the perfection of mental attitudes that aid in the perception of and adherence to human values. If this cannot be lived then you can't say you are a part of the Bihar Yoga tradition. The presentation of yoga devised by our guru, Swami Satyananda, and developed as the Bihar Yoga tradition is one of the most comprehensive, complete and holistic approaches to yoga in the world, treating the needs of the body, the mind and also the spirit, yet adopting the path of discipline.

Yoga is discipline. The opening statement of the *Yoga Sutras* is, "Yoga is a form of discipline." However, Sage Patanjali's discipline is not an imposed discipline; rather, it is a subtle transformation, of which you become a witness, which changes your nature, your attitude, your perception, which allows you more freedom in your personal expressions, which allows you to have continuous experience of control, harmony, peace and bliss. If one can follow yogic discipline then all these can be experienced, as discipline in its true sense means a process of transformation which eventually touches your expressions at all levels. Your eyes speak of that. Your smile speaks of that. Your actions speak of that. Your thoughts speak of that. It expresses the balance, the control or *sanyam*, and the harmony that you experience through yoga.

Discipline is the prime factor in the tradition and in today's attempt to understand yoga. Yoga is a process of education leading to inner discipline, inner clarity and inner strength. After all, you have come to Ganga Darshan to learn something different from what you are used to. Therefore, while you are here, make an attempt to experience that something different. If it helps you, you are the winner. If it doesn't help you, it is all right. You are still the winner because you had a relaxed time for four months before going back to the so-called normal human civilization.

Spiritual life

The third aspect of the environment is spiritual. What is spirituality? Is thinking about God spiritual? Is thinking about the scriptures spiritual? Is adherence to some form of ritual spiritual? Is a belief in a particular thought form spiritual? How do we define spirituality? If our attempt is to bring a balance between spiritual values and the modern, material lifestyle, then what is the concept of spiritual in this framework? In my understanding, spirituality is a state that you come to by going through certain changes and transformations within.

Previously we were not aware of our mind, we were only aware of our body. However, when we became aware of the mind, it gave us new insight and a new understanding of human life, existence, performance and interaction. Then, when we discovered what the emotions were, it gave a different meaning to the life we were living. When we discovered what the conscious, subconscious and unconscious were within the mind, we were able to place certain concepts, ideas, events or happenings which we could not explain logically. We placed them in the realm of the subconscious and the unconscious, and we discovered that to be true later on. Each discovery, each transformation that has come about has opened up new avenues of how to live more happily, in a better way and with greater adjustment. Similarly, when we reach that level of spirituality then again there will be a change in how we live our lives.

Spirituality is a state. It is an expression of the deeper self, when the deeper, inner self becomes aware of its existence. To reach this point, the process of spirituality is nothing but *anushasana*, inner discipline, and the yamas and niyamas. Just a few of the yamas and niyamas should be enough in the present state of life and society. Once we begin to apply the yamas and niyamas and begin the process of discovering their effects on our behaviour, on our being, this is the beginning of the spiritual journey.

Spirituality does not advocate high-flying beliefs and philosophies which sound good; rather, it is a process of making the present the most fulfilling by creating an awakening within. This awakening happens when you have mastered the basic instincts of life. If there is no control over anger, if you are the same reactive person you always have been, then what was the use of practising meditation for twenty years? It means you were on the wrong path.

Yoga is very clear in saying that spiritual life is a life of attainment only. It is a process that nobody can stop, just as the body grows from the day it is conceived; there is no control over it. You cannot stop physical growth; you can't say, "I don't want to be size eleven, I prefer to be size four." You cannot do that to your spiritual growth either. Once it begins, it keeps on going, and you feel better with each step. There are low moments when we begin to question and doubt, but there are moments of inspiration too, moments of happiness that can inspire us to come out of the doubts. That is the spiritual environment which one learns to adopt in life.

—20 September 2000

What is the effect of kirtan?

Kirtan plays an important part in yogic or spiritual life, just as hatha yoga, raja yoga, meditation or kundalini yoga does. This is because we exist at different levels of experience simultaneously. There is the sensorial level, where experience comes only through the senses; the intellectual level, the rational mind, which gives rise to likes and dislikes, aspirations and ambitions; the emotional level, the level of feelings, of sensitivity, where one is able to connect with something non-rational and be in tune with the energy that transforms sensitivity and feelings into emotion; the psychic level, which includes latent impressions, ingrained attitudes, habits, samskaras and karmas that define character and self-identity; and at the spiritual level, which can only be directly experienced when the other four levels are in harmony.

In the process of yoga, we have to access and bring each level together little by little, rather than focusing on just one level or dimension: only the body or only the mind or only the feelings. If we are able to develop a fully comprehensive awareness then, according to the tradition, complete fulfilment, *poornata*, can be experienced in this life.

Just as in this process, raja yoga, jnana yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga may be important, to the same extent and intensity kirtan is also recommended. Kirtan is the chanting of different names of the Self of which we are a part, an expression; we all express different manifestations and identities of the Self. These names are composed in Sanskrit of *aksharas*, or sound syllables, that never change. While they may appear to indicate a manifest form of divinity, in which, for example, Rama may invoke the image of Rama, and similarly for Krishna, Buddha and Christ, the mantras do not represent a personalized identity of the divinity, but an expression of that force and energy. When you chant the names, it is the syllables that alter the patterns of the mind according to the different sound frequencies and vibrations, making it more clear, tranquil, receptive, and complete, thus increasing sensitivity and feeling. This sensitivity will help you connect with the source of your being and then you experience yoga. This is the purpose and meaning of kirtan.

Just as we have an IQ, intelligence quotient, we also have an EQ, emotional quotient. The emotional quotient is not just confined to expressions of love and affection, compassion and charity; rather it is expressed as a sensitivity in all areas, no matter where your mind is directed. Your mind may be directed to a particular point or focus, yet there is an awareness in which the whole field is also covered. In chanting the name, you are expressing sentiments that are free from the conditioning of such external inputs or *samskaras*, and you are expressing those sentiments to this pure being, which is your personal God; and if purity is an expression of God, why not learn how to connect with that?

Kirtan helps to achieve the state wherein one is able to express one's feelings towards the pure nature in their purest form. This devotion is different from expressing a religious sentiment. It brings out the pure self and enhances the sensitivity, and one is able to connect with the pure being: this equals yoga.

Therefore, kirtan has a very prominent place in ashram life, in yogic life and in the lives of all spiritual seekers. Kirtan is yoga for the feelings. Just as hatha yoga is yoga for physical purification, raja yoga is a yogic system for understanding the mind, kriya yoga is a process of psychic awakening and kundalini yoga a process of kundalini awakening, kirtan is a process of awakening sensitivity.

—22 September 2000

The process of yoga

Yoga was first taught by God to Brahma, the creator. God was Hiranyagarbha. *Hiranyagarbha* means the 'golden womb' or 'golden egg', the cosmic womb or cosmic egg. Brahma is the force, the consciousness of creation, responsible for the manifest dimensions as well as the dimensions that are unknown, unmanifest, yet which exist in the realm of possibilities within Brahma. Brahma in turn taught yoga to Vasishtha. That is the sequence of the guru mantras:

*Om namo Brahmadibhyo
Brahmaavidya sampradaya kartribhyo
Vansharishibhyo namo Gurubhyaha
Narayanam padmabhavam Vasishtham
Shaktim cha tatputra-parasharam cha*

Hiranyagarbha was Narayana. Narayana taught Brahma, and Brahma taught his son, Vasishtha. Vasishtha was a sage of great repute; he was a *brahmarshi*, a seer of all the worlds. From Vasishtha, the tradition of yoga was handed down through a lineage of thinkers, saints and personalities who are not part of a myth but part of history, of humanity.

What was the need for yoga? If we believe that Narayana, the source of life, taught yoga to Brahma, the force or energy responsible for the creation of life, then it indicates the beginning of a new cycle of life. In this cycle the sprout emerges from the seed and becomes a tree, and in the tree is the fruit that contains the seed which, when planted, comes full circle. It is more like a universal, cosmic, divine play, known as *lila*. Just as the different parts of the body all working together become responsible for the health of the body, similarly, each human being and each form of creation nourishes the other to attain its fulfilment and totality and is therefore part of a big, complex organism.

Yoga is that process of going full circle. From a seed we have become a personality, possessing a particular nature. Now it is time to realize the potential of that nature and to encourage the birth of the fruit containing the seed, which again takes us back to the source. This is the concept of spirituality that has been interpreted and described by religious people as a religious phenomena, by scientists as a scientific phenomena, by yogis as a spiritual phenomena, and by philosophers as a philosophical possibility. Thus, there have been many approaches, but this has been the basic underlying form.

The entire process of knowing and realizing the evolution of life and one's role in it is the process of yoga; life not only in our body but life as a whole, encompassing the human being, nature and God. This is known as *avyakta*, the unmanifest, and *vyakta*, the manifest nature or *prakriti*; the current and the undercurrent. *Vyakta* is the current on the surface, which is visible, which is seen, creating different waves and movements. *Avyakta* is the undercurrent inside the body, unseen, unknown, yet exerting a very powerful control and force over the movement of the water.

Life has been seen not only in the form of a body, but also in the form of abstract realities, in the form of *tattvas* or elements, in the form of *spandan* or vibration, in the form of single-cell life forms, in the form of sentient and insentient

creations. As we go back to the source, the imbalances that are created naturally, due to interaction in the world of objects and senses, are rectified. Yoga has mostly been a process of knowing, realizing, and becoming aware. This awareness begins with the most simple and gross object, the body, and it becomes as subtle as knowing the effect of karma at another level. In this manner, this awareness spans many dimensions of existence: in the form of physical activity, in the form of mental activity, in the form of emotional activity, in the form of belief, logic, expression, in the form of spiritual awareness, in the form of desires for peace, happiness and bliss, and in the form of security, comfort and luxury. Whenever our mind and the faculty of mind, awareness, can work together to find that stability, security, comfort and sense of well being, that becomes a particular state experienced by the mind, which is unique. Therefore, awareness spans many levels of existence at the same time.

The heaviest concentration of awareness is at the level of the senses. The opposite holds true at the inner level, at the time of *moksha*, realization or emancipation. The process in between is the passive aspect. Imagine a cable with a live wire running through it. Both ends of the cable are unsealed. If you touch either end you will get a shock, but you can hold the cable, which is protected, and not get a shock. This is what is perceived as the material and spiritual expressions of an individual. Material means totally involved, engrossed and attached; spiritual means totally detached, non-involved and content. People are generally aware of these two extremes in life; they are not aware of the connection that exists between these two different experiences.

When we are touched by the materialistic approach, our expression becomes more materialistic in nature. When we are touched by spiritual values then that becomes more appealing. When we are again touched by the material aspects of life then, despite the spiritual aspect, the material becomes more appealing. Then suddenly a realization comes that we should again become spiritual. This is known as *raga*

and *dvesha*, like and dislike: confusion, conflict, not knowing where to tread, and not having that inner self-confidence to actually learn something and see how it can improve or worsen the situation. This is when yoga comes in as an education in internal discipline.

Yoga is nothing but a process of education leading to inner discipline, inner clarity and inner strength. With strength come all the qualities we consider appropriate and right. With clarity comes the wisdom to apply those qualities, the right one at the right time. With confidence you are able to bypass arrogance, the negative expression of ego, and thus elevate yourself. Recognizing the physical, spiritual, moral, psychological and psychic needs, yoga has developed a system of practices that can remove many kinds of irregularities and abnormalities from our life. I am using the words 'many kinds', not 'all', as most of human nature is still untapped. We don't know what will come out of you tomorrow. Whatever comes out tomorrow will have to be dealt with in tomorrow's manner, not in today's manner. Therefore, many of the identified abnormalities and irregularities can be managed and corrected through the yogic system. This is the process of yoga.

—10 October 2000

Initiation

Initiation is like opening the doors of another reality, another room in the house. We live in a house with many rooms, with several of them still locked. The chakras are the locks. What has been defined in religious terminology as removing the veil and in yogic terminology as awakening the chakras indicates that there are still many unopened rooms. There are different forms of initiation to open different doors. One door opens when you are initiated into mantra, another when you are initiated into sannyasa and another with shaktipat.

Mantra diksha, initiation into mantra, is the first and simplest initiation. Any mantra exerts a very powerful control

on ajna chakra. Ajna chakra is the chakra of sensitivity, the chakra that has to become active before mooladhara chakra can be awakened. That is the theory of kundalini yoga. Therefore, the first initiation, mantra, opens a door. Apart from all the other effects, this is one of the functions.

In the tantras, emphasis has been given to the use of mantras for inner transformation, whereas the Vedas emphasize the use of mantras to propitiate nature and the elements. Therefore, vedic mantras and tantric mantras are different. In yoga we deal with tantric mantras for inner purification and inner transformation. Once you become a master of that, then other things can follow.

The spiritual name is an aim to follow and attain in life. It should work like a carrot dangling in front of a donkey. As long as the carrot is in sight, the donkey keeps walking towards it. You should all become like the donkey and follow the carrot. The only difference is that the carrot will not be illusive. By walking a few steps towards it, you will have the carrot in your mouth. The name provides the focus and aim to attain. A name has a relationship with an aspect of your nature and spirit which can be felt intuitively by a few people who are aware of it. That name represents the need, the aspiration of the human spirit in this life to become that, to attain that.

Being Sanskrit, the name also evokes a particular vibrational response, as Sanskrit is a combination of sounds that create a frequency change in the vibratory aspect of our personality. When we say the name in Sanskrit using a combination of sounds that have the power to harmonize, alter and change the pattern of our vibratory waves or *spandan*, that quality of spirit is then lived. It does not only remain an aim to attain; rather, we become that. Of course, this has to be practised as sadhana and not taken for granted. If a plate of food is placed in front of you, you can eat it and satisfy yourself. If you choose to ignore it and just wear the name like a label, or use the mantra as an aid to deepen meditation, that is fine too; however, the potential is much greater.

Sannyasa diksha opens another door, another chakra. Karma sannyasa diksha and the conviction to live like a karma sannyasin, not just being initiated but actually wilfully living like that, opens another door. It is creating harmony between the various dimensions of your expression and experience. By sensitizing the mind you are able to perceive and become aware of many other situations, events and experiences which previously you would have chosen to ignore. Initiation is not escapism; it is becoming aware of areas that you ignored in the past and which created some psychological, emotional, intellectual, psychic or spiritual obstruction in your personality.

The third form of initiation after sannyasa is shaktipat. In this also there is the vedic way and the tantric way. There are different types of shaktipat: *drig diksha*, initiation through sight; *sparsha diksha*, initiation through touch; *kurma diksha*, initiation by thought; *swapna diksha*, initiation by dream. Only the guru can decide which type the disciple qualifies for. If there is aspiration for spiritual upliftment, then the choice has to be the guru's.

—10 October 2000

Awareness of the goal

Try to maintain a constant and continuous awareness of your spiritual goal. The awareness has to be just like a mother's awareness of her infant who is crawling around the kitchen while she is cooking the food. She does not continuously watch what the baby is doing; however, at the appropriate moment she ensures that the baby is safe from all dangers and hazards. What is reflected in the attention of the mother should also be reflected in the attention of a yogi.

There is no need to be constantly thinking, 'This is my spiritual goal, this is my aspiration, this is my target, this is my aim', yet one part of the mind has to be continuously attentive to that goal. That urge has to be felt, and with that urge there is also an expectation. If you have to meet your

boyfriend or girlfriend in the evening, then the waiting begins in the morning. You do whatever else you have to do; however, you are always looking forward to the time when you will be able to meet your friend. That attentive expression of the self which the yogis try to awaken is known as the *drashta*, the witness, the seer, the observer. According to yoga, for this attitude to become permanent and long-lasting, you need to have self-control, you need to be able to manage the mind. First, *chitta vritti nirodhah* – “Yoga is managing the *vrittis* (modifications) of *chitta*”, and then *drashta*. This is one method.

Another method is that of a *bhakta*. A *bhakta* is not a devotee; a *bhakta* is one who has learnt to appreciate himself and what he is. It is the acceptance of oneself as one is: ‘I am what I am, with all the qualities, faults, eccentric behaviour, positive behaviour, good and bad thoughts.’ It is learning to appreciate oneself, accepting the situations and experiences as part of one’s natural growth.

Wherever there is growth, there is bound to be conflict and pain. This suffering can become manifest physically, socially, materially, financially, emotionally, spiritually or psychically. However, the awareness that ‘I am undergoing this experience’ and not being swayed by the intensity of the experience are the symptoms of a person who meditates. They are the expressions of a person who follows the path of yoga, the path of tantra. This self-acceptance or self-appreciation with deep awareness of one’s existence also develops the *drashta bhava*, the witnessing aspect of the self. Therefore, in the yogic process, there is mind management, and then the *drashta* aspect is awakened. This tantric approach enables you to build up the qualities already inherent in you.

The second path, although it sounds simpler, is much more difficult and complex. When we are following the mind, there is a sequence: patterns of thoughts, patterns of fear and insecurity, patterns of association, attachment and affection, patterns of likes and dislikes, patterns of peace

and aggression, which manifest naturally and spontaneously in the mind. In the yogic process, we can become aware of these patterns and follow them to the end. However, in a life where you have to be natural and spontaneous, where rather than subjecting oneself to the whims of likes and dislikes, emotions, feelings and desires, you have to become more aware of the natural qualities inherent in you, that becomes a difficult process. Nonetheless, once you get into the swing of realizing the qualities that you have and nurturing and applying those qualities for the betterment of your personal life and social interactions, then the vibration changes. See which path is appropriate and applicable to you. The path of yoga is not to be negated, nor is the path of the bhakta. However, you have to find your stability in one path or the other; there is no experimentation.

Attentive consciousness is what has to be maintained, not a meditative consciousness, because meditation is like a black hole: you get sucked into it, and attentive consciousness is like a white hole: you are propelled from that centre outwards. It is this guidance that Krishna gave to Arjuna many times in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “Come out of yourself, come out of your mind patterns, become aware of your dharma and live according to the laws of dharma.” Forget that you are the one who is suffering. Suffering is the law of nature. We suffer when somebody close leaves us, we suffer when we have to leave something: some area, some place, some person with whom we have developed a close affinity. Suffering is the law of life. Therefore, do not identify with the suffering; identify with the dharma and expand and grow outwards, while maintaining that attentive consciousness. You don’t have to be continuously looking at something to keep that personal idea or object in focus. Live a natural, spontaneous life and maintain attentive consciousness; then you can experience the fulfilment of yoga in your life.

—4 December 2000

Growth of yoga

If you are aware of the changes that have taken place in the dimension of yoga, you will see that in the last forty years yoga has been accepted in different ways at different times. In the 1960s, yoga was seen more as a physical practice. Yoga teachers taught yoga for trimming the waistline, for getting rid of facial wrinkles and for beautifying the body through asana. In the 1970s, there was some interest in meditation, for relaxation and stress management. The concentration and relaxation techniques of yoga came to the forefront.

In the 1980s, the application of yoga was more in specific areas of society: prisons, rehabilitation centres, for the elderly. It took on the flavour of a family practice: the grandmother can do it to be mobile, the children can do it, young people can do it to manage their habits, the housewife can do it. Yoga came with that flavour. In the 1990s, there was a renaissance in yoga philosophy. People wanted to know the purpose and aim of yoga and to define it from the perspective of modern needs.

The first decade of the twenty-first century will be a period when yoga will combine both theory and practice. That is very evident with the establishment of Bihar Yoga Bharati, the yoga university. We have been exposed to yoga in the form of asana, pranayama, meditation and relaxation, as well as some kriya yoga, some laya yoga, some nada yoga, some this yoga, some that yoga. However, all that understanding and knowledge is only fringe knowledge and not an understanding of the entire body of yoga.

A deepening of yogic knowledge, both in theory and in practice, is going to take place now. What is the effect of asanas on the body and mind; the effect of meditation on blood pressure, hormones and glands; the aim of the kriya and kundalini yoga practices? What does the tradition say? Which scriptures have talked about different human needs and how they relate to us today? How can we increase our understanding of yoga to make it a part of our personal culture?

Once upon a time, people believed that yoga was a religion, or part of Hinduism; however, today we find even that mentality has changed and yoga is seen as a subject in its own right. From my perspective, as a person involved in the propagation of yoga, I see a very bright future of yoga. I see yoga becoming part of the personal culture of people everywhere. Just as most people have a basic understanding of medicine and keep a first-aid kit in their home, similarly, the basic concepts of yoga will become known to everybody in the course of time. "Today I am feeling a bit stiff so I will do this asana. Today I am feeling a bit dull so I will do this pranayama. Today I am feeling low in energy, my digestion is not good, so I will practise agnisara kriya for a few minutes." We are going to come to that point where yoga becomes part of our personal culture and we will understand the relevance of yoga for the maintenance of the body, mind and spirit. Therefore, there has to be in-depth teaching and training in yoga.

Some people come to our university with the idea of learning advanced yoga for spiritual emancipation. When we tell them they will learn basic yoga to begin with, many people leave. They say, "Why? I want to learn how to meditate eight hours a day. I want to use my time for my spiritual development. This is what we are here for." If that is the case then they should have a clear concept of what spirituality is. Spirituality is not escaping from life; it is escaping into life. If you have to escape into life, become aware of the areas through which you interact and be in control of those qualities which you express in life. That is the first point.

The second point is management of the gunas to maintain the sattvic state of mind or being. One has to be in control of the three gunas: tamas, rajas and sattwa. How many people make the effort to maintain a sattvic state of mind for an extended period of time during the day? When we are feeling lazy, lethargic, sleepy or withdrawn, do we have the ability to come out of that state and maintain our mental harmony? No. When we are feeling aggressive

and agitated, do we have the ability to pacify the mental and emotional fluctuations? No. It seems that rather than accepting such ups and downs in the human personality and nature, and working to balance, channel and harmonize them, we have chosen to escape from them. Those who choose to escape from such situations can never perfect yoga in their lives.

If we are frightened of our fears and insecurities, we can never perfect yoga. Human beings need to become much stronger when it comes to self-acceptance. Another tendency that we have is to accept the good and reject the bad, yet can we apply it to ourselves? Can we accept and work to transform the bad in ourselves? It is difficult. The aspirations can be very high, but the efforts do not justify the aspirations.

Yoga has to be understood from this perspective now: rather than reaching for instant solutions, you have to search for long-lasting solutions. You also have to know which system or tradition can be continuous and evolving. Yoga has proved to be continuous and evolving. From the sixties onwards, so much new age stuff has come and gone without leaving any trace, but yoga has been constant. There was never a time when people could say, “This is the final limit of yoga and there is nothing beyond it.” Every time somebody reached the final understanding of yoga, there was something more beyond it. It is this ‘something more beyond it’ that has made yoga accepted in today’s world as being relevant to the human personality and nature.

The third point is channelling the energies of emotion. After all, what is emotion? Energy in motion. When we are feeling the motion of a loving energy, it becomes an emotion. When we are experiencing the motion of an aggressive energy, it becomes an emotion. Therefore, emotion is energy in motion, and channelling that energy is the third component of yoga in today’s world.

Management of the gunas will ensure that your behaviour is appropriate. Management of emotion will ensure that your

focus is proper and not egocentric. Acceptance will ensure that you are able to have a clear understanding of life as you go through it. These are the three teachings of yoga relevant for this decade. The teaching and understanding of yoga must be in these areas in order to bring a human being to a point of excellence. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we should be able to define yoga as a process of attaining excellence in life.

As yoga teachers, it is our duty and obligation to ensure that this understanding develops in our students. If you wish to meditate, let there be excellence in meditation. If you wish to work hard, let the work be viewed as excellence in meditative work. Work should become meditation and there has to be excellence in it.

—4 December 2000

What is the purpose of emotions? How can we use them to express ourselves and serve others?

Emotions are double-edged swords. Emotion, which is energy in motion, plays a double role. One role is to bind, the other role is to free. Anger can bind and anger can free. Love can bind and love can free. Compassion can bind and compassion can free you also. Management of emotion is the subject of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti yoga is not the ritualistic devotion that one expresses to God; rather, it is the redirection of feeling, the redirection of an emotion from binding the personality, the consciousness, to releasing the energy. Emotion cannot be understood logically. Intellect is a function of the head and emotion is a function of the heart. Where we try to combine both, we create confusion. Therefore, yoga has been very clear in stating that the meditative dimensions of yoga such as pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi deal with transformation of the manifestations of intellect in the realm of the mind. Once the mind is pacified then purity of heart has to come about. That purity can be achieved by enlarging

one's heart, expanding one's feelings, developing *atmabhava*, seeing oneself in others.

When we are able to see ourselves in other people then the emotions become bhakti, the emotions become purified. That is not an easy thing to do. How can I see myself in others? How can I discriminate as to how much I can do to make the other person happy? This is the role of *viveka*, discrimination, which comes when the truth, *satya*, is experienced with the channelling of emotions. In Rikhia, we have seen the way Swami Satyananda is teaching us to live. It is a learning process. It is excellence in the expression of personality, the expression of attitudes, performance, thought; excellence in knowing what is needed. It is that excellence which one has to imbibe and that can only come with *atmabhava*, when you are able to see yourself in others.

Seeing oneself in others is not easy because we are so caught up in our own desires and what we wish to achieve. Therefore, it is not something that you can decide to start doing from today. To perfect meditation is easier than perfecting *atmabhava*. To manage the mind is easier than managing one's emotions. Just as there is *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* for the mind, there is *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* for the emotions as well. To stop the chatter of the mind you have to practise *antar mouna*. To stop the dissipated emotions you have to practise *antar darshan*. To be able to witness the mind you need to practise *chidakasha dharana*. To be able to witness the emotions you need to practise *hridayakasha dharana*. Yoga has stated very clearly that these are the techniques by which you can manage your mind and purify your emotions. If we maintain our effort in *sadhana*, we will come to a point where we will be able to see ourselves as part of other people, and that is the fulfilment of yoga.

—6 December 2000

THE MEANING OF YAJNA

In Rikhia, Sri Swamiji told us a story about a god, a demon and a human being. These three went to their creator, Brahma, for instructions on how to live a happy life. While they were on their way to Brahma, the clouds rumbled and a roll of thunder came out of nowhere. The three said, “We have heard the message of the creator and now there is no need to go to him.”

What was it that they heard in the roll of the thunder-clouds? The god heard the word *damadvam*, which to him meant restraint of the senses and mind. Sometimes the gods behave like millionaires. They live in a five-star hotel called heaven where every facility and comfort exists. They have nightclubs, music, dances, pleasure and enjoyment, so for them the message from the creator was restraint of the senses and the mind.

The demon’s representative also heard a word, which was *dayadvam*. The nature of demons is cruel, destructive and negative; they represent all the negative qualities of life. Therefore, the word meant to be compassionate to other creatures, to be kind to other beings, to be considerate to other life forms. Compassion was the message for the demons.

The human being also heard a word in the roll of thunder, which was *danadvam*. Human beings by nature are creatures who accumulate things. Accumulation of wealth, property and knick-knacks that help to boost one’s ego, prestige and self-esteem is human nature. Therefore, the message that the humans received was *danadvam*, which means not to accumulate or possess but to give away. This giving away later on became yajna.

Different forms of yajna

Yajna means to offer and this offering takes place at many levels. In *anna yajna* there is offering of grains and food. In *dana yajna* there is offering of material wealth. The sadhana,

the austerities you perform to transform and uplift yourself, in which you offer all your negative qualities to the fire and become pure, is known as *tapah yajna*. In this way, yajnas took on different forms, indicating a process by which human beings could purify themselves and also ensure purity in the environment, purity of speech, thought and action, and the ability to understand the link that exists between an individual and nature, and between nature and the cosmos.

The seed of yajna was sown when human beings heard the divine message: “Give, offer, do not accumulate.” In the course of time, yajnas became part of the tantric and vedic traditions. On culmination of a sadhana, yajna is performed in order to share the attainments and the spiritual and material prosperity that has been gained. Yajnas were also used to propitiate the natural forces and cosmic energies, the natural luminous beings that govern the elements, different celestial events, and the different expressions in life. Through mantra and yantra, yajna awakens the power contained within the natural forces and makes them beneficent and auspicious for the development and growth of life on earth, as well as in heaven and hell.

There are other forms of yajna which individuals from different strata of society could also perform in order to establish their authority in society. The kings used to perform a yajna known as *ashwamedha yajna*. When they had to declare themselves as emperors, they would send out a horse followed by the army. That horse would travel freely around the world. The rulers of whichever country it was passing through either had to seize the horse and challenge the authority of the king who had sent it, by having a war, or accept the horse and become subordinate to the king. Therefore, yajnas had many different forms and components and happened in different ways. However, I am talking more specifically of the yajna that aims at uniting the individual mind with the cosmic mind. It is this method of yajna that the tantras and the Vedas adopted.

Chandi yajna

During the Sat Chandi Mahayajna at Rikhia, Sri Swamiji mentioned that it is taken straight from the tantras. The aim of tantra has been to purify oneself without negation of life's situations, without negation of the weaknesses that we have inherited. Tantric yajnas invoke energy, Shakti. If you have a dirty pot you take a hosepipe and clean the pot with the water of the pipe. Similarly, the tantric yajnas represent the flow of water in the pipe. We are the dirty pots and it is the force of the water that cleans the pot.

The Sat Chandi Mahayajna represents one of the highest forms of tantric ritual. Chandi is the aggressive aspect of the Mother. Chandi comes into existence when all human and divine efforts have failed. There is a limit to human effort and there is a limit to divine effort. The story of Chandi is described in the book *Durga Saptashati*, which relates the glories of the Cosmic Mother. The story begins with a war between the gods and the demons. The gods gave the demons a solid thrashing and the demons were expelled from heaven. The entire balance of the universe was disturbed. Instead of peace and harmony, chaos and struggle were the order of the day. In a state of absolute demoralization, the gods went and told their woes to the trinity: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer.

Listening to the sufferings of the devas, the three gods became angry and a form, a shape, manifested from their anger. That was Chandi, who is also known as Durga. Durga was born from the luminosity of each deva and she represents the synthesis of all the cosmic powers. The story describes how she entered the fray and was able to vanquish all the demons who were harassing the devas. In Hindu mythology, Durga is seen to be the final manifestation of the universal power who appears to establish peace, dharma, justice, and to remove people's suffering and woe. That is the mythological background.

In Shakta tantra, the part of tantra that worships the Devi, the Chandi yajna is considered to be a very important

form of worship. Not every pandit can perform this kind of ritual. The acharyas who perform the Chandi yajna are experts in the tantric and vedic rituals.

The entire procedure of the yajna is the recreation of the cosmic abode of Durga, Chandi, the cosmic energy. The *yajnashala*, the place where the yajna is performed, has sixteen pillars. In each pillar a deva is invoked who become the guardians. In different corners of the yajnashala there are representations of different deities. The nine planets, the *navagrahas*, and the deities of the nine planets are worshipped. Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles, is worshipped. The *matrikas*, the minor forces or energies of the Mother, are worshipped. The sixty-four yoginis, the sixty-four aspects of the Mother are worshipped. In this way, through the chanting of mantras the pandits invoke different energies, in different forms, in different areas of the yajnashala. Once they are in their proper place, the Cosmic Mother is invoked and the yajna begins.

Sankalpa

A yajna must have a purpose, a sankalpa, which defines its aim. As the host of the yajna, Sri Swamiji gave the sankalpa of 'peace, prosperity, plenty and spiritual upliftment', which was not confined to one person or one community but for the entire world. On the first day the sankalpa was taken, the acharyas conducting the arati prayed for the fulfilment of the sankalpa. On the second day, the rural community of Rikhia was represented and they prayed for the fulfilment of the sankalpa. On the third day, the nation was represented by different families from the north, south, east and west of India. On the fourth day, the world was represented by people of different nationalities. On the final day, all the energies that had been invoked were released.

The yajnashala was like a body; it became a living being, a living entity. On the first day the *prana*, the life-force, was infused. On the last day that life-force was released, and what remained was only an empty shell, like a dead body.

You will not notice the results of the yajna now, but in three months, six months, maybe in one year's time, you will see that your life has turned around and it has become much better, happier, and more blissful. It is something you will experience and notice as time goes by.

Since the pandits are constantly chanting, do they have more opportunity for spiritual evolution?

The acharyas chant the mantras with a sankalpa, for a reason and a purpose. All their energies and efforts are directed to the fulfilment of that purpose, not for their personal gain. They become the medium; humanity is the winner.

The tantric and vedic traditions are very clear on the subject of sankalpa. During the yajna many people would come to me asking if they could offer an amulet, some water, a flower or some tika to the pooja place. I would say no, because when a yajna is being conducted, it is for a special reason. If somebody imposes their own reasons on the event, nobody is a winner; rather, everybody is a loser because the main focus is taken away. When people asked me if they could pray for somebody who was ill, suffering from cancer, or HIV, I would tell them to pray in their minds, not in the yajnishala. Personal wishes or desires are not to be mixed with the purpose of the yajna.

This principle also applies to the acharyas who chant the mantras. They also feel transformed while they are chanting, yet they are not praying for the fulfilment of their wishes; they are praying for the fulfilment of the sankalpa. Therefore, they derive the same spiritual benefit from the yajna as everybody else.

—6 December 2000

When we worship an object or form or symbol, like the Devi in Rikhia, can't it become an obstacle? We become so engrossed in trying to attach our spirituality to this form that we neglect each other and our environment. Shouldn't

we be worshipping instead each and every person present around us?

There is no harm in worshipping everyone present around us, providing our worship does not make them big-headed. It is not only we who are important, the object of worship is equally important. If the person we worship is not balanced, their ego will go sky-high, and that is the danger of worshipping everyone. Worship by nature must instil a sense of purity, humbleness, awe and respect, and it should be mutual.

We also worship the guru. The guru is not swayed by emotions when being worshipped, there is equanimity. If we are able to offer our worship to the feeling and existence of equanimity, then we are part of nature, and we can worship nature in any way we wish.

There are two aspects of worship: exoteric and esoteric. When we feel hungry, we go to the kitchen, make something to eat, and eat it. That is the external effort, which stops when we have swallowed the food. However, the process of digestion goes on, unknown to us. That is the internal aspect, the esoteric aspect, over which we have no control. Up to a point we are in control of what we do; beyond that things happen according to the law of nature, the law of the divine. It is the same in worship. Up to a point we can worship according to the pleasure of our heart, but thereafter the worship goes on internally, unknown to us, in the psychic dimension. Therefore, it is impossible and impractical to have the same sentiment for everyone we encounter.

What you saw in Rikhia was the attachment to form. However, the culmination of the worship was the sadhana of Swami Satyananda; it was his sankalpa working through it. If you had identified with Sri Swamiji's sankalpa and not with the people who had just come to see a show and who had no feeling for it, you would have felt differently. The purity and intensity of the sankalpa and the participation of Sri Swamiji was the moving factor of the worship. Those who were able to witness that intensity which he was expressing in his own inner being would have realized the worth of the worship.

Maybe in the entire group there were only ten or twenty people who were connected, and it only takes one person to be connected for the worship to be fruitful.

One has to connect one's feelings with what is happening, whether it is a spiritual, material or social effort. When the feeling is strong and we are able to experience the intensity of the feeling with our participation, then even in chaos we are able to glimpse harmony. Being able to witness harmony in chaos is the biggest miracle that can happen.

Express your devotion, ensuring that you are pure and the object to which you are offering your devotion is pure. That is when bhakti comes alive.

—7 December 2000

How can we defend ourselves from the aggressive energies?

If you try to defend yourself from an aggressive energy, the energy becomes more potent and powerful. If there is a storm outside and a tree decides to stand upright against the storm, the storm is eventually going to break the tree. However, if the tree decides to bend, the storm will pass over and the tree can stand up again, like the palm tree. Similarly, if you are facing a storm outside and you decide to be rigid then be ready to face the consequences. If you decide to bend, be assured that you will walk straight again one day. It is a human characteristic that needs to be cultivated: not to defend but to bend. Those people who bend become immortal. Those people who stay upright break like twigs and are never heard of again.

What is guru kripa? What are the prerequisites to obtain it? What changes happen then and why doesn't the grace of guru last longer?

The grace of guru will only last for the time you open yourself to receive the grace. The moment you close yourself, it stops. You can fill a bottle with urine, cork it and place it in the middle of the Ganges river for a thousand years, in the

belief that the Ganges will purify the urine in the bottle, yet when you remove the bottle and uncork it, the water inside will still taste like one-thousand-year-old amaroli. However, if you fill a bottle with urine, leave it uncorked and put it in the river, in one day it will be washed clean and there won't be any trace of amaroli.

Which category of bottle are you? Closed or open? This is not a joke. Despite our mutterings and musings, we all bottle ourselves up and we don't have the ability to uncork ourselves. It is a fact that you wish to see the guru according to your expectations, aspirations and impressions, and do not accept the guru as the guru is. If this is the mentality, then how can we open ourselves to accept, to receive the grace?

The relationship with God is similar. We say to God, "You are the master, but become my servant and do my bidding." We order God around by praying to Him to help us with this problem, to help that person with that problem, to help with a disease or a nervous breakdown, or by providing someone with a child. That is how we relate with God. "Oh God, you are the master, but please do my bidding and help A, B, C, D, my uncle, my niece, my nephew, my wife, my child, my friend, my this, my that." By praying like this we hope for the grace to descend.

Guru's grace or God's grace does not descend until there is absolute selfless projection of one's ego, *ahamkara*. For the selfless projection of the ego to take place, all the dross of the human nature and personality has to be removed first. It is not an easy process. People say, "Surrender." Surrendering is not easy. People say, "Love." Loving is not easy. People say, "Obey." Obeying is not easy. People say, "Have pure intentions." Even that is not easy.

Nothing is easy in life. One has to work to make things happen. One has to work to purify oneself and to open the channel by which the grace can come. The channel which opens is the channel of sincerity. The channel which opens the flow of grace is the channel of innocence. Learning to be innocent, humble, simple, uninhibited and free from the

effects of the ego is the sadhana, the training given to be able to receive the grace of God or the grace of guru. It is much more complex and difficult than any yoga practice which one may perfect. We take great pride in having performed the headstand or the wheel pose or the peacock pose. Why can't we take equal pride when we are able to perform some good work with ourselves, with our mind, with our ego? Therefore, although we talk about guru's grace or God's grace, it is a very distant reality in our lives. One has to strive to purify the mind of *raga* and *dvesha*, of the experiences that give pleasure, satisfaction and contentment, and of the experiences that give displeasure, dissatisfaction and discontent. This is the first level of purity that is demanded, not recommended but demanded.

The second level of purity is being innocent. When you are innocent you don't apply your intellectual mind to decide things according to your choices and wishes. Rather, you become like an empty flute through which new melodies can flow when played by an expert player.

Guru's grace will only last for the time that you have uncorked yourself. Sometimes we even fear removing the cork, thinking, 'I will lose myself, I will lose my identity. What will happen to me?' The insecurities come forth and they bind us to this plane. If these things did not exist then we would not exist; we would all be enlightened. Therefore, it is important that they have a say in our life, but only a say. They should not control our life; we should be able to control our life. Do that and you will see the sky burst and a ray of light fall on your head.

—8 December 2000

What would you like to say to us right now?

Believe in yourself. Know that you have the strength, the ability, the courage and the will to transform yourself. The best way to reach this point is through silence, not through logic or intellect, or questions and discussion. So many books

have been written, still people continue to ask questions. The answers have been given in all the scriptures and by different masters and saints, still we ask for the reason: the why, when and how. We ask the same questions over and over again, even though we have been given the answers.

Learn in silence about the mysteries of life by understanding and believing that you have the strength, the courage and the ability. You can definitely make a barren piece of ground into a flowering garden. The method you can choose yourself. If water is not available nearby, you will have to dig a well or a channel from a nearby river. You know that you have to water the garden, so you will have to find your own method. You will have to find the means to procure the right seeds and protect them by providing whatever is necessary for their growth.

It becomes easy and simple if you believe in yourself and have will and sincerity. It is no use sitting down with your head in your hands, thinking, 'God, what shall I do with my patch of land? It is full of rocks and there is no water nearby.' That fatalistic attitude is the road to hell. That is the biggest obstacle one has to overcome. The attitude of faith is the stairway to heaven. Therefore, never be a fatalist. Always have faith in yourself.

—13 December 2000



2001

New Year message

The New Year should be celebrated continuously until spring. Spring brings joy, spring nurtures life. In nature, what is underground during the winter months remains protected and when the warmth of spring comes, the seed grows. Grass can be under ice and snow, apparently lifeless, but when the snow melts and the sunlight penetrates, the frozen, barren ground suddenly becomes green.

At New Year, people make resolutions. A seed, a resolution, a *sankalpa*, can be lying under the ice and snow of winter. When the light of wisdom, the light of vidya shines and removes the ice and snow of ignorance and vice, the seed can become whatever it is meant to be.

One should make a sankalpa, one should plant a seed within. Just as in nature the manifest beauty of creation can be experienced in a plant, so too the possibilities of creation can be visualized with the planting of a seed. A new seed provides a vision of the possibilities of creation, which are as auspicious, uplifting, inspiring and encouraging as a created, visible plant.

The seed, the resolution, the sankalpa, has to have a bearing on our whole life. It has to become a part of us until we leave this body, and not only remain a thought of the day. Otherwise, we confuse our sankalpa with our desires and dreams. Desires and dreams can take us in the right direction

and also in the wrong direction. We desire and the sankalpa becomes that desire. We dream and the sankalpa becomes that dream.

The sankalpa has to be based on the realities in which we live. If the sankalpa is to have an effect in twenty, forty or fifty years, the preparation has to be thought out properly. Swami Sivananda's vision of a yoga university was completed by Swami Satyananda with the creation of Ganga Darshan. This vision laid the groundwork for something mammoth, the purpose of which became clear later on.

A sankalpa should be framed to achieve, attain and lead to the experience of change and transformation. When you hear, feel, know or see something pleasant or unpleasant, you notice a change in your mind and emotions. You should not only notice and experience, but also live that transformation. If you have experienced bliss for only one second at any time in the past, then that experience can be extended. Gaining the ability to extend the length of experience is the purpose of tantra, whether it is in the form of shaktipat, yoga, lifestyle, a thought, belief, ritual or philosophy.

Make a resolution which will have far-reaching consequences in your life, and for the welfare and wellbeing of all concerned. The resolution should express your creativity, your compassionate sentiments, honesty and simplicity.

If you want to make a yogic sankalpa, then adopt the eighteen ITIES of Swami Sivananda.

*Serenity, Regularity, Absence of Vanity,
Sincerity, Simplicity, Veracity,
Equanimity, Fixity, Non-irritability,
Adaptability, Humility, Tenacity,
Integrity, Nobility, Magnanimity,
Charity, Generosity, Purity.*

Each month practise one ITY. If you are able to live these eighteen ITIES for eighteen months, then you will gain

something invaluable in your life. Who knows, maybe even immortality.

I wish you a very happy and fulfilling New Year.

—1 January 2001

Under the guidance of Swami Satyananda and the auspices of Sivananda Math, efforts are being made for the all-round development of the people in Rikhia. What are the implications of these activities for our yoga movement?

Firstly, you have to understand that the yoga movement is not for your own personal, selfish growth, although yoga begins with a very selfish attitude. If somebody is sick, they come to yoga in order to become healthy, to help overcome the sickness. If somebody is mentally disturbed, they come to yoga to overcome their mental disturbance. Whatever the purpose, whether it is for release of tension, to find peace, or to have some extraordinary spiritual enlightenment, people come to yoga due to a selfish need, desire and reason.

The selfish nature represents ‘me’, the individual, and the unselfish nature represents others. We have to work with the selfish nature to harmonize it and to begin to connect with the fragmented aspects of our personality and make them whole. Once they are made whole, then that wholesome attitude is projected out into society. Yoga then becomes an expression not of an individual sadhana, but of helping others.

There are two aspects to yoga: the personal sadhana aspect and the external aspect. The personal sadhana aspect has been defined in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* as yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. These are the eight stages of yoga, as defined by Sage Patanjali, for self-development.

Swami Sivananda defined another eight stages of yoga beyond Sage Patanjali. He said that Sage Patanjali’s yoga is for personal purification and personal development, to realize one’s nature. However, after you have realized your

nature, after you have come to terms with yourself, you have to move to help others, following the simple logic that a tree doesn't eat its own fruit and a plant doesn't smell the scent of its own flowers. The fruits of the tree are meant for the pleasure of others, the smell of the flowers is meant for the pleasure of others. Anything that radiates and contains beauty is not to please ourselves but to please others. Therefore, even in yoga, once you have experienced the beauty of yoga, that beauty pleases others. If you attain samadhi then your behaviour, attitude, actions and thoughts beautify the lives of others. It allows other people who are not exposed to yoga or to spiritual life to have that experience of the beauty and tranquillity that is being expressed in the lives of those who have experienced yoga and attained yoga in their lives.

Swami Sivananda described the eightfold path of yoga beyond Sage Patanjali as serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. These are the external expressions of yoga. After samadhi, what happens naturally and spontaneously? You begin to connect with other people, and the moment you connect with other people seva begins, due to love, compassion and connection. When seva is happening then you begin to expand and develop the love that you have confined to a few to greater areas. You begin to perceive the world as one family, as one nation, not as a group of nations divided by political and ideological belief systems.

This is the social dimension of yoga being presented by Sivananda Math through the example of Swami Satyananda. If we are able to understand that, then we will see that yoga begins with the body, travels through the mind, the emotions and the spirit reaching out to humanity, and then goes beyond humanity into the dimension of Godhood. That has been the training and the system of yoga as taught by our guru, Swami Satyananda.

—25 July 2001

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna talks about action without expectation. If we don't expect, from where will come the motivation, inspiration and energy to act?

There are two types of karma: *sakama*, with expectation and desire, and *nishkama*, without expectation and desire. The fulfilment of personal desires is based on name, fame, power, money, security, and so on. The focus is external, social, personal, self-oriented and self-motivated. At this level we are seeking fulfilment and satisfaction. This is the focus of our actions in the world.

Nishkama means being disinterested, doing work without expectation. Now, it would be wrong to say that one can exist without expectations. There is expectation, but instead of a mundane, worldly expectation, it is possible to direct the feeling towards spiritual thoughts and God. Whenever we perform an action, we are responsible for the action and its outcome. The action can give us praise or abuse, it can give us monetary wealth or take it away. While performing actions, we are very conscious of what will lead to gain. If an action may lead to abuse, we will try to avoid it. If an action may result in our losing money, we will try to avoid it. We are constantly looking for ways to avoid the unpleasant, and this choice is known as *sakama*. *Sakama* means avoiding the unpleasant and working for the pleasant, that is, with expectation.

Nishkama, without expectation, involves actions with the mind fixed on spiritual, not worldly, thoughts. A servant has to perform many unpalatable activities, yet does so by dis-identifying with the action. The servant knows the outcome is the responsibility of the master giving the instructions. To become *nishkama*, free from expectations, one needs to have the same attitude towards God: to think of whatever one does as *seva* or service to God, to guru, to humanity.

Expectations are caused by our association with the world, the senses and objects. Detachment from expectations is the result of going beyond the normal associations of the mind and connecting the mind with the higher reality. We

cannot create a transformation in the mind just by thinking that from today we will perform selfless actions. There has to be an awareness of performing actions, not with a vested interest, but to express our creativity and to ensure that whatever we do gives good results.

—31 October 2001

What is the function of the guru element or guru tattwa?

People say that the guru is the remover of *avidya*, darkness, nescience. Where does this *avidya* lie? What does it mean? The darkness, the nescience, the *avidya*, is the covering over the light, which has to be removed. The centre of this light is the heart, not the mind. From unconditional light it has become conditioned light, from unconditional love it has become conditioned love, from unconditional feeling it has become conditioned feeling. There are many such coverings over the heart and the guru aims to remove them.

You have to deal with the mind yourself. The process of dealing with the mind has been defined in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. “Management of the mental modifications is yoga”, this is the second sutra. “After you have managed your mind you will establish yourself in your own nature”, this is the third sutra. Here, personal effort is emphasized in order to deal with and manage the mind. However, when you want to remove the conditionings from life and express the unconditional nature, then the guru comes in.

For the practice of yoga and for managing your mind, you do not need a guru. Systems have been defined very clearly. You can learn and practise yoga at home from a book, from any teacher, and you will get some benefits. However, when it comes to removing the veil of *avidya* from the heart, then the guru comes in, as it is the guru who tells us how we can let go of our ego, how we can surrender, how we can develop our faith, how we can develop conviction, how we can develop clarity of perception, action, thought, speech, and so on. The spiritual teaching that is imparted

by the guru is to develop the unconditional heart, not the unconditional mind.

The role of the guru is to open the heart. The role of yoga is to open the mind. The role of an ashram is to open the perceptions that allow you to involve yourself in effort. These roles are predefined. In the ashram we practise effort, *purushartha*, we learn to control the mind through discipline and to awaken the *bhava*, the emotion, towards the guru. These are the three components: ashram life for discipline and motivation; yoga for mind management; guru for opening the heart.

—14 November 2001

Must one pray with faith and emotion for that prayer to be received, as we have heard that even with praise the gods and goddesses become happy?

When you praise somebody, you are using your mind to create a concept, an idea, which is pleasing to you and which you feel will please the other person. This means that your heart is not in it: it is only a manipulation of words and emotions.

The senses like praise because they feel fulfilled by it. Each sense has its own specific function and role in which it becomes fulfilled. The ears like to hear praise because the ear is directly connected with the ego. Physiologically the ear is connected to the brain, but yoga and the other ancient traditions say that there is a direct connection between the ego and the ears. Therefore, whenever something pleasant happens or when something pleasing is said, we feel elated and happy because the ego has been pumped up. However, when something unpleasant is said, we feel unhappy as the ego has been deflated. What you hear is going directly to the aspect of ego, influencing self-esteem and self-image. Those people who identify with the ego, who see themselves as great or small, big or tiny, like praise very much; yet praise is only a manipulation of words and emotions to either boost up the ego or deflate it.

Praise is not prayer. Prayer is heart talk, and it becomes effective when it is isolated from the mind, when it is purely a heart feeling. When all the external doors are closed, then only one door opens: the internal door. When all the external doors of the mind are closed then only the door of the heart opens. When the crookedness of the mind has been stilled, when the agitations of the mind have become peaceful, when the deviousness and dubious nature of the mind has been transformed, then the heart becomes active.

Prayers that come from the heart go straight to God. That is the direct phone line. If you ever want to phone God, do not use the public call office of the head; use the private call office of the heart. Then you will have a direct connection, as from the private office the call is local and from the public office the call is inter-cosmic and very expensive!

Change the sentence “God is nowhere” to “God is now here.” This is all you have to do in praise and prayer. In praise God is nowhere, in prayer God is now here: it’s as simple as that. Prayer is the song of the heart, and this prayer is your connection, your telephone line, which will always be heard. Praise may not be heard, but prayers will always be heard.

—14 November 2001

What pleases you?

Definitely not your praise because if you can praise me today you can abuse me tomorrow! Prayer doesn’t reach this far because prayer is directed only to God, not to another human being. What will please me the most is your determination and motivation to live in a just, appropriate, positive and creative manner. If you can do that, then neither praise nor prayer is needed.

—14 November 2001

The inspirer

When I first came to the ashram and used to study the *Bhagavad Gita*, I would often come across the verse in which Arjuna asks Krishna, “Tell me how a person of awakened wisdom lives, thinks, acts, speaks, sits, walks, and eats?” Reading that verse would conjure up in my mind the image of a yogi, a siddha, who had awakened the kundalini, sometimes looking like Christ, sometimes like Buddha, sometimes like a sadhu in the remote Himalayan caves. Along with that image would come another question: ‘Who are these people?’ Such questions continued to preoccupy my mind for many years. Now, when I look at Sri Swamiji, I can see that the statement of the *Bhagavad Gita* is fulfilled in him. How does a person of stable wisdom live? How does a siddha live like an ordinary person?

Sri Swamiji is my guru, but more than that he is the inspirer in my life: one who can inspire new thoughts, new actions, new courage and strength, one who can inspire faith, devotion and compassion. As the inspirer in my life, I can find fulfilment by emulating and living his teachings.

Every time I see him, a new aspect, a new dimension, opens up before my eyes. Never has there been a person so simple and spontaneous, one who can be so practical and compassionate at the same time, one who can combine the highest wisdom with easy laughter. All these qualities are becoming more and more predominant in him every day. Today I can definitely say that although we have not seen Christ, or Buddha, or other great people who have walked upon this planet, seeing Sri Swamiji one can believe that such people did walk upon this earth once upon a time, and that it is possible for such people to live amidst us and to become examples of inspiration and learning.

—23 December 2001

How can we become more devoted?

Devotion is an expression of qualities such as faith and belief coming together. Faith and belief are not abstract qualities; rather, they represent some basic realizations that you may have had about yourself and about God. We can say belief is personal reflection and faith is universal reflection. You have faith in God, something and somebody whom you have never seen and may not see in this lifetime, yet the faith continues. There is faith in some transcendental form of existence, and there is belief in yourself.

Every aspect of creation is guided by its inherent nature. The nature of a fruit tree is to eventually bear fruit. The nature of a human being is to experience peace, truth and bliss. If the seed of a fruit tree is left above ground in the middle of a desert, it will not germinate, much less become a tree and fulfil its nature by bringing forth fruit. You have to plant the seed, care for it and create the right environment for it to fulfil its destiny. It is the same with human beings. The nature of a human being is to experience *satyam*, truth; *shivam*, positivity, auspiciousness; and *sundaram*, beauty. However, to have this experience you have to create the right environment. You cannot just say, “I am going to fulfil my destiny.”

The right environment begins with belief in one's own potential and ability; and faith in God, *Ishwara pranidhana*, knowing one is being guided and directed, and that the essence in oneself is the same as the essence of God. This is the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Whether water is contained in an ocean, a river, a lake or a cloud, the essence is the same: H₂O. Similarly, the essence of God and the reflection of that essence in us is the same. We call the essence of water H₂O and the essence of divinity God. Recognizing and realizing that essence is the development of faith and belief. Therefore, one component of bhakti is dropping the masks and experiencing the reality at a personal level, a social level and a global level. If the aim of bhakti is to experience the truth, then the first sadhana of bhakti is to realize the truth of who you are and what you are.

Once faith and belief are alive and active, the emotions are channelled, and this is bhakti. Emotion is e-motion: energy in motion. When it is directed outwards into the world, we experience pleasure, pain, change, likes, dislikes, fulfilment, satisfaction, as well as a vacuum and emptiness. However, when the same energies are directed inwards with the help of faith and belief, it becomes bhakti. Bhakti is channelling the emotions towards transcendental realization.

—24 December 2001

How can one experience freedom and surrender to the divine will at the same time?

Freedom, as a concept, can be viewed from different angles. There are people who have spiritual inclinations, who believe one is bound by this world, by this body and mind, and that in order to attain realization one has to become free from the bondage of the senses, mind, emotions, and so on. That is one vision of freedom people pursue.

Another perspective on freedom is to be free from rules and regulations, to rebel against the set norms of society, and to want to do things that are not commonly done. That gives a feeling of power and control, a feeling that we are doing something greater than society expects from us.

Common sense, and the yogic perspective, should enable us to understand that there are limitations and restrictions imposed upon everything in this creation. The senses have limitations, the mind has limitations, feelings have limitations, even our concepts are limited, and the laws created by human society are also limited. Therefore, rather than thinking of freedom, we should think about our responsibilities. Just as a part of us seeks freedom, there is a part within us that seeks the fulfilment of responsibilities. If we connect with responsibility, freedom comes naturally. There is no freedom in the idea of 'freedom'; however, there is freedom in responsibility. How is this possible? Let us start by understanding what the responsibilities are.

From the yogic perspective, there are four responsibilities: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha*. We are responsible for our own emancipation, and the effort we make is the effort of *moksha*. That is the responsibility that goes with the desire for *moksha*, liberation. We are responsible for the growth of our own nature and personality, for developing the beauty inherent within us, and for becoming a better person. These are the responsibilities of *dharma*, appropriate living. Similarly, there are the responsibilities of *kama*, emotional fulfilment, and *artha*, material fulfilment.

Once we look at the positive, constructive and creative side of these four responsibilities, it is possible to become free from the bondage that is self-created, and which inhibits and restricts the expressions of the mind and senses. This is where *viveka*, discrimination, plays an important role. When we are dealing with the responsibilities of *kama*, how do we know which desire is appropriate and will uplift us, and which is inappropriate and will push us further into obsessions and darkness? Here *viveka buddhi*, or the discriminative ability, plays a major role in deciding in which direction we need to go.

In reality, there are only two directions in life. One is known as *pravritti* and the other *nivritti*. *Pravritti* means 'subject to the world' and *nivritti* means 'subject to the divine will'. When we are walking the path of *pravritti*, we are subject to the world. Here, the nature of the mind and senses is guided and coloured by gross and material aspirations. That is when we feel bondage, when we are not able to connect with the positive 'me'. We feel restricted in our expressions. We feel something is lacking in our life. We feel motivation, yet we are unable to fulfil that motivation. This happens when there is association with the *pravritti* path, the gross, the material, the sensorial.

The second path is the *nivritti* path, where we subject ourselves to the divine will. That divine will is not the will of the senses and mind, or of the emotions; rather, it is the will

that comes up spontaneously from the depth of our being, and with which we connect.

When we are connecting with the higher will, God's will or the cosmic will, our inspiration and faith make us free from the limitations imposed when the senses and personality are directed out into the realm of the material world. Therefore, rather than craving for freedom, one should be aware of the responsibilities towards oneself and towards one's own growth. Just as there are social responsibilities, communal responsibilities and personal responsibilities, connecting with the responsibilities that belong to the realm of moksha and dharma will make one free.

—24 December 2001

How can problems be avoided?

Problems can't be avoided because we don't want to avoid them. If we didn't care about problems, they wouldn't exist. We like to take on problems, for we are guided by our self-image. Our self-image says one has to be good, considerate and kind, and that is the front we always try to project. As long as we are consciously or unconsciously following the dictates of our self-image, we will never be free from problems.

What is a problem? A problem is something you take upon yourself which is not your natural inclination or expression. Other people imposing their difficulties can become a problem. Somebody offering to help can also be a problem if the help is not expressed in the right manner. Even musing over things can become a problem. Encountering situations that can affect, change and alter our self-perception can become a problem. A sudden influx of negative thoughts can become a problem. An influx of good thoughts is never a problem, but negative thoughts can always become problems. Desires can become problems.

The main reason why we are unable to cope with problems is that although our logic says, "Don't have

problems”, our nature says, “Keep on attracting problems.” Just as light will attract moths, similarly, this body and this mind will attract difficulties and problems. You have to remember Murphy’s Law: “Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.” However, you also have to remember that motion comes because of friction. If one wishes to have a pleasant, peaceful, quiet life, it will become very dull. You may enjoy the peace for a day, you may enjoy the silence for a month, but there will come a time when you will reject that peace and silence for some dynamism, some activity, some motivation in life. Therefore, friction, problems, difficulties and conflicts are to be accepted rather than shunned.

The right solution has to be found and to do this one needs to cultivate the faculty of *viveka*, discrimination. Discrimination becomes powerful and real only when it is combined with far-sightedness; otherwise, discrimination is simply a word. Discrimination plus far-sightedness equals wisdom. Friction, conflicts, difficulties, fights and disagreements are not impediments to your development towards peace and growth; rather, they bring to the surface a condition of mind, a condition of belief, a condition of life that is actually becoming a barrier to your growth. A mental thought that becomes a block is recognized as a problem, so why not work to remove it?

The best way to handle problems is to know beforehand whether or not you wish to involve yourself in the problem. If you can tackle that problem efficiently, effectively and creatively, then that opens the door of logic, intellect, intuition and emotion by making your search for the solution. If you feel a problem to be a burden, then it closes the mind and stops the creativity of the mind from discovering the right solution to the problem. Therefore, never avoid problems. If they come let them come; just try not to attract them.

—27 December 2001

TOWARDS FREEDOM

What makes one a terrorist and what makes one a good person? It is the mind. The mind can be a saint and the mind can be a sinner, and it is that mind which has to be dealt with. As a system of mind management, yoga helps to change and transform the hyper-agitated mind and make it more peaceful and content. In the beginning we come to yoga to deal with our mind, to deal with tension, frustration and anxiety, to learn how to relax and let go. Eventually, as our involvement with yoga increases, we come to know the other dimensions and aspects of yoga; however, originally the effort is to understand the mind.

There are two paths in life. One path is known as *pravritti*, towards materialism, towards the senses; and the other path is *nivritti*, towards freedom, towards harmony. In our personality we have different attributes that pull us towards *pravritti* and also towards *nivritti*. The basic character of a human being on the sensorial path, *pravritti*, manifests as awareness of ambitions and limitations, whereas *nivritti*, the path of freedom, is characterized by awareness of needs and strengths. *Pravritti* is ambition and limitation. *Nivritti* is strength and need.

Instead of being driven by our ambitions, we should be driven by our needs. Instead of highlighting our limitations and weaknesses, we should be highlighting our positive strengths and qualities. With just this much change we can move from *pravritti*, sensorial bondage, or the state of technological hypnosis, towards freedom and a more natural life.

Although the process is simple, it is also very involved, as we have never been trained in how to educate and discipline the mind. We are not able to look at ourselves. We are performers, what is known in vedantic terminology as *bhokta*, the enjoyer, and *karta*, the doer; we are not witnesses of the performance. Yoga says you have to be the *drashta*, the witness of what you enjoy, the witness of your actions.

Governing the subtle personality

The first three sutras of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* define the process of yoga. The first sutra is: *Atha yoga anushasanam* – "Yoga is to be understood as a form of discipline." The second sutra is: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* – "Yoga is a system of mind management, of managing the modifications of mind." The third sutra is: *Tada drashtuh svaroope avasthanam* – "Once the mind is managed and guided, a person becomes the seer, the observer, and that observer establishes himself or herself in their own true nature." These three sutras are the most relevant ones to understand in today's context.

In our early life, the education we are provided with helps us to become more aggressive and competitive. It gives us the skills, concepts and ideas to act at the outer material level: to know how to attain the things we desire, how to acquire money, how to have an affluent society and how to be a part of it, how to excel in our profession or field of expertise. The entire education is directed towards building a better 'outer me', whereas how to become a better 'inner me' is not part of the education policy. The spiritual and yogic traditions try to fill this gap.

In yoga, the concept of discipline is governing the subtle processes of one's personality. Sage Patanjali has used the word 'anushasana', which in English has been translated as discipline; however, this translation is not correct. Discipline means establishing certain rules, conditions and norms; defining certain parameters within which one has to function and act. Discipline actually means *niyama* and the word *anushasana* means governance. The personality has to be governed just as a country or society has to be governed. In a country you have good and bad people. In a society you have good and bad people. Within you have goodness and badness, and what is within has to be governed in the right manner so that it does not become a barrier or a restrictive factor, but rather helps to create a condition in which one can be optimally creative.

Governing the subtle nature, the subtle personality, is yoga, according to the first sutra. The entrance to the subtle personality is through the mind. The mind is not a biological function; it is not a specific function of the brain. The mind is an energy responsible for action and reaction, for the implementation of ideas. It is composed of many different items: thoughts, desires, ambitions, perceptions, samskaras, karmas, and they all become mature at some time.

Becoming the witness

The mind can be helped along through a process of balanced education. Right now, the development of the mind is lopsided. Our mind has been trained to look outwards and when the mind looks out, it has no foundations inside, no connection with its source, and it can become disturbed. However, if we are able to provide a link with the inner self, then that mind guides the performance of the individual and ensures one is unaffected by the negativity it may receive from the world. There is a saying that realized beings live like the lotus in water. The lotus grows in water, yet has a natural protection against water, remaining totally unaffected by it.

When the mind is connected with the outer manifest world, it gives birth to different vrittis. Vrittis are the agitations or the spikes in the waves of mind. If there is a gentle breeze blowing over the surface of the ocean, we hardly see the small ripples playing on the surface. However, if there is a storm then those ripples can become ten or twenty foot waves, with the strength to destroy many things that come in their way. Vrittis are the giant waves created on the surface of the mind when there is external agitation. What is anger? It is a mental vritti. When we are angry, something has agitated our mind and made us angry. When we are afraid, something has agitated the mind and we are frightened. When we are depressed, something has agitated and shocked the mind, so we are depressed. These are the various vrittis with which we have to deal in the course of our yogic journey.

The purpose of yoga is to ensure that the natural state of the mind remains constant, tranquil, so that only small ripples will be created when we are dealing with the world. Yoga has said that by developing the component of awareness one can find solutions to many of life's problems. Is it possible to remain aware when we are agitated and angry? Is it possible to remain aware of what is happening to us when we are in confusion, suffering, pain and conflict? Right now, no, but one has to aim at developing this awareness, even in these situations. When this awareness is developed, it makes one the drashta, the knower, the observer of all that goes on inside. This drashta, the seer, then becomes the controller or guide of actions, of attitudes, of behaviour, and you find your balance in life. One who is able to find their balance is known as a yogi. A yogi is not a person who practises yoga; a yogi is a person who has been able to find inner balance. This comes with awareness, when you become a drashta as a natural culmination of the awareness you have developed.

The individual and the universe

From the yogic perspective, there are three levels that have to be managed: the senses at the physical or gross level; the mind at the mental or subtle level; and the ego, *ahamkara*, at the causal level. Ahamkara or self-identity is the cause of our individuality. Now, there is no need to become a Borg, the half-human, half-mechanical character in *Star Trek*, whose only job is to assimilate different civilizations and cultures. 'Borgs' live in a collective consciousness and their favourite sentence is, "Resistance is futile, you will be assimilated."

If God were merely part of the collective consciousness, we would all become 'Borgs'. However, God is very much an individual, in the sense that God can be realized in all extreme conditions and situations. One can see the existence of God in a grain of sand. One can see the existence of God in the manifest and unmanifest universe. If a mosquito bites your little toe, who feels the pain? Of course the little toe is affected

and swollen and itchy, yet the centre of pain is somewhere else. Our body is a microcosmos in itself; our body represents the theory of the unified field. All the organs work together and are coordinated with each other. What happens to the little toe affects the whole body, the brain, the mind, and who knows, at deeper levels it may affect the spirit. We don't know that, but we do know that any change in the normal state of any part of the body will affect the entire body.

Similarly, any change in our life is also going to make a difference to the greater body of which we are all a part. When we are happy and content, the energy we radiate will make others happy and content, whereas if we are angry and sad, the energy that we radiate will also make others angry and sad. In order to experience divinity, one has to experience joy, one has to experience creativity. When we raise, awaken and generate that energy, it can bring us closer to our spiritual nature and the transcendental nature.

We experience the spiritual nature within, and we experience the transcendental nature when we connect with other beings at a spiritual level. There is a difference between the spiritual and the transcendental. Spiritual experience is personal experience. When that personal experience becomes global, universal, it is known as 'transcendental', as you have transcended your body and mind, the areas where you were having that experience, and connected with other people. Therefore, the spiritual nature is a personal experience and the transcendental nature is a universal experience, and both are connected.

From ego to ananda

Ego is the last barrier to moving into the spiritual dimensions. The last of samadhi is *asmita samadhi*, the samadhi of ego. *Asmita* means self-identity, ahamkara, ego. After *asmita samadhi*, cessation of ego, is *ananda samadhi*, or blissful samadhi.

Despite contrary beliefs that yoga or the spiritual traditions take away one's individuality, we need to under-

stand that the concept of individuality is dealt with in yoga in the form of ahamkara, distorted or perverted self-identity. Self-identity becomes more predominant as you go through the yogic process, as you are aware of yourself every step of the way. You are trying to build up a new self-image, a new self-identity, so you are working at the level of ego. By becoming the drashta, the observer, the seer, you are working with your self-identity and improving it.

If you begin to carve a statue out of a stone, what self-identity is the stone losing? None; rather it is developing a new identity that will be witnessed and appreciated by many people. The gross, unnecessary material is being removed from the stone and what is left behind is the material necessary to turn the stone into a statue. Similarly, in spiritual life there is no loss of self-identity; rather, the distorted perceptions are corrected, the aggressive ego expressions are redefined, and the new soft you, the new wiser you, the new creative you, becomes the new identity.

As long as you maintain the idea that this identity is continually transforming and changing and there is no fixed status, no fixed form, you can overcome asmita or ahamkara. However, the moment you fix yourself in a new identity, it will again become distorted. For this reason, the spiritual masters have maintained that it is necessary to be ready to accept any change, not because they want anyone to lose their personal identity, but because they wish to take the practitioner beyond the effects of distorted identity. Do not be fixed in one perception; learn to accept and allow the change to happen. The aim is to overcome the asmita, the ego, and become established in a state of bliss, as it is at that level of bliss, *ananda*, that the spiritual experiences are transformed into transcendental experiences. The process of yoga is moving from basic governance of the human personality to the experience of ananda: from anusahasana to swarupe avasthanam.

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2002

Can love and fear coexist?

Love and fear coexist just as sun and shadow coexist, like the play of night and day. If someone expresses a quality of love, whether sublime or mundane, the fear that is the outcome of that love will also be expressed. There will always be love and fear as long as human beings hold on to the present definition of love as a form of attachment. When you love somebody or something, there is a close association that will bring with it a form of attachment, a form of desire, and the attraction becomes stronger and stronger. Attachments are bound to be created and fear is the natural outcome.

If you want to be free from the fear associated with love, then the definition of love has to change. People do not know how to love because the consciousness is stuck at the level of mooladhara. Although love exists, it is coloured and tainted by the influence of mooladhara, which is the desire for stability and security. When you transcend mooladhara and come to swadhisthana, love takes another colour. When you come to manipura, the colour of love will change again, becoming more aggressive and dynamic. As long as the expression of love is at the level of mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura, there is also bound to be fear.

Real change is felt only when the consciousness comes to the level of anahata and you connect with the positive expression of love. Love is a quality, not a desire; it is the

inherent nature of a human being. Just as each element has an inherent quality, a nature that it expresses optimally, love also has a quality. At the level of anahata, love expresses itself differently; it becomes a nature, not a desire.

At present we want love out of desire, whether biological or sexual, to fill an emotional vacuum, out of insecurity, or a desire for comfort and safety. That love is mental, emotional, psychological and sensual, and is defined as gross love. The most basic form of love is when we seek to fulfil a need or vacuum in our life. When love simply becomes our nature and a part of our life without thinking about it, then the concept of love has taken on a different meaning, as it is not coloured by desire. This is the love that the masters have said one must try to attain. The greater the influence of desire on love, the more one is subject to the influence of guilt and fear. This can only change when the desire for personal fulfilment and satisfaction at gross levels changes to the experience of pure love.

Sthitaprajna is a different form of love where wisdom prevails over the needs and desires. In that love, one experiences peace and bliss. It flows through the senses, becomes energy and radiates out. This love can make people forget their own instinctive nature. There are stories that in ashrams in ancient India, tigers and sheep would forget their natural animosity and drink together from the same water hole. All the natural fears would be dropped in an environment of pure love.

Bhakti yoga aims at making love pure, transcendental and focused, by getting rid of fear and guilt and providing a focus and direction for the emotions. When love is said to emanate from the higher Self it becomes fulfilling. We belong to the world because our associations and identifications are with the world. You may give your wisdom to someone the best that you can; however, what you receive will depend on the other person's level of consciousness, which may be lower or higher. When you identify with the love you receive from someone, then your own consciousness

will move up or down to the same level as theirs. Love is not simply an act of giving; it is also an act of receiving. When you give love, you receive love and when you receive love, your mind adjusts to the nature of love being received. However, the exchange happens at a superficial level.

In bhakti yoga, a focus is given to the channelling of emotions and an effort is made to make love into a spontaneous expression of the self while interrelating with the manifest world. Sri Swamiji has said that emotions are pure, like a crystal ball. A crystal ball has no colour of its own, it is transparent, and when placed on a coloured cloth, it will reflect the colours of the cloth. In the same manner, when our emotions come into contact with different people and objects, they take on the colours of that person or object.

If your emotions attach themselves to money, that emotion will be identified as greed. If your emotions become attached to the opposite sex, that emotion will be passion. If attached to your enemy, that emotion will be animosity or hatred; if attached to somebody near and dear to you, that will be known as affection; and if your emotions attach themselves to higher consciousness, then that emotion will be known as bhakti, and it will manifest as pure love, *shuddha prem*.

Bhakti yoga is a powerful tool for the generation and expression of love without boundaries: universal love. However, the process of bhakti yoga, although it sounds simple, is complex, as you have to recondition the existing human nature and rechannel all the forces that flow out to converge at a single point of focus. That point can be called God, the force of creation; it can be called guru, the energy that removes ignorance and darkness; it can be called love, prem. The meaning of the word *prem* is to appreciate and be identified with something intensely and silently. In that identification there is absolute peace. There is not even the birth of a desire. It is a state of contentment, wholeness and fulfilment. However, to come to this point, basic changes have to take place in attitude, beliefs and the expression of

love, in order to purify oneself. All these areas are covered in bhakti yoga.

The process of bhakti yoga seems simple, just as the processes in hatha yoga, raja yoga or kriya yoga seem simple, yet the aim is quite different from the process. The aim of hatha yoga is purification and harmony of the body. The concept of harmony of the body is quite complex, but the process is simple: asana, shatkarma, and so forth. The aim of raja yoga is self-management; the process is yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. The purpose of kundalini yoga is to awaken the dormant potential; the process is chakras, mantras, yantras, and so on. The aim of bhakti yoga is to identify with the pure nature of emotions, love and spirit. The process is through kirtan, mantra, adoration, contemplation, prayer, and so forth. However, these transformations have to take place in an area of the personality that has not yet been mapped or charted. Therefore, there are nine stages to bhakti yoga, and one should be able to attain each stage, experience it and live it. These stages are:

1. *Encounter with truth*: The first form of bhakti is encounter with the inherent truth. While that statement sounds simple, what does it really mean? We all wear different kinds of masks which we don for self-identity. Each mask projects us as a particular type of person at different times, hiding our true nature. The discovery of truth is learning to live without a mask so you can discover who you are, what your real nature is, after dropping all the masks. This is the first attainment of bhakti.

2. *Identification with the godly qualities*: Identifying with the positive and the uplifting qualities of godhood is the second form of bhakti. In the Indian tradition, people have defined the qualities that must exist in a yogi, a saint or a realized being. For example, Jainism has clear definitions of how to know when a person has become *arahant*, enlightened: what conditions need to be fulfilled. If people tell us that God is within and can be realized, then upon realization

that would make us identify with the godly nature and we would have the same potential as God, at a microcosmic not macrocosmic level. Therefore, in the second form of bhakti, we identify with the qualities of the godly nature and they take a place in our life.

In order to impress somebody, even the most crooked person can behave in a diplomatic and refined manner. Similarly, in order to experience the transcendental nature, that same person can adjust and adapt to express a divine quality. Through identification with that quality there will be identification with and understanding of the nature of God, and a transformation of the whole personality can take place.

3. *Adherence to the teachings*: The third form of bhakti is adhering to the teachings given by the guru, the enlightened master, with innocence and simplicity, following in his footsteps sincerely without superimposing your own ideas and beliefs upon the teachings you have received. When you try to adjust and accommodate the teachings to suit your own needs then the teachings become irrelevant. However, when the teaching is taken in the spirit of learning, in order to improve the quality of life, then it becomes a relevant personal philosophy, a way of life.

4. *Acceptance of reality*: The fourth form of bhakti is being aware of the miracle of the glory of God without manipulation or deviousness. In this form of bhakti, we learn to accept reality as it exists. Our normal tendency is to try to adjust reality to suit ourselves. In summer we try to make our environment cool; in winter we try to make it warm, even though suffering a little heat in summer and cold in winter makes the body strong. Therefore, be aware of the glory of reality and learn to accept it as an ongoing process. Every step of life is a kind of miracle. St John of the Cross said, "I swear by God, I die every night." That is one miracle, and the fact that you wake up in the morning is another. The fact that you can analyze things is another miracle, and that you can be aware of every moment as it goes by is another. We

do not live merely in a mechanical clockwork world. There is also a way to respond directly to the miraculous expressions of every dimension of life. We learn about them and we live our lives guided by them, and accept that reality.

5. *Remembrance of God with faith through mantra*: The fifth form of bhakti is remembrance of God's name, God's nature and God's wisdom, with absolute faith. Faith is the natural outcome of acceptance. Once there is faith then remembrance will follow, which is the key to opening your connection with the Cosmic Self. Gold is taken out of the earth, refined and made into a necklace, which you wear. While the original appearance has changed, the essence is still gold. If that necklace falls into the lavatory, you value it enough to put your hand in to retrieve it, wash it and wear it again. In the same manner, you have to value the remembrance of God and be ready to retrieve that remembrance from any pit into which it falls.

Faith comes in bhakti and with faith comes remembrance. Remembrance is a link between the lower self and the higher self in the form of a mantra. Mantra is that force which liberates the mind, without identifying with it: *Mananat trayate iti mantrah*. Normally there is some association with every word. If somebody says you are good, you associate with the word 'good' and feel happy. If somebody says you are bad, you associate with the word 'bad' and feel bad. The self-image and self-esteem are affected because you tend to see ourselves through the eyes of others and do not know your real nature.

Mantras are vibrations that do not have a literal meaning or association; they are sounds produced from vibrations with particular frequencies that activate a part of the brain, the energy and chakras, and the consciousness. The body is full of vibrations, and identification with the inherent vibrations leads one to realization of the godly nature. Knowledge of vibration has existed in the past. In the Bible it says, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God." In the Upanishads it is said, *Om iti, yad aksharam vidam*

– “Om existed, exists and will exist.” Om is the primordial, cosmic sound.

Matter is nothing but compressed energy. If we were able to look into the molecular structure of any object, we would find atoms, electrons, protons and neutrons, all moving in a predetermined way. In the centre we would find the nucleus vibrating. Wherever there is vibration and movement, there is bound to be a frequency and, therefore, sound. Mantras represent that vibration, that frequency, that sound. Thus, the fifth form of bhakti is using mantras to go deep inside one’s mind and consciousness, without any identification with the intellectual mind or the inner experience, and remaining connected with faith.

6. *Restrained and graceful action*: The sixth form of bhakti is modesty and gracefulness, which is an outer expression in life where you are living and expressing your human dharma. Yoga is known as restrained expression. When we are not restrained, it means that our actions are not clearly guided and do not really have a purpose. In yoga the idea of restraint does not mean to hold back but to give purpose, direction, motivation and clarity to whatever we do. Knowledgeable, considered action is where you restrain the usual tendencies of the mind, focus upon one thing and fulfil it.

Dharma is generally defined in English as duty, commitment or obligation; however, the real meaning of *dharma* is an attitude, a mentality, a lifestyle which you are able to maintain and which helps to uplift your life. There are three major components of dharma: appropriate thinking, appropriate behaviour and appropriate action. Dharma means doing what is appropriate, guided by wisdom. Therefore, the sixth form of bhakti is giving yourself a focus and fulfilling your human dharma by performing the appropriate action in a graceful manner.

7. *Seeing divinity in everything*: The seventh form of bhakti is the ability to see divinity in everything by realizing that the divine spark exists in every aspect of creation. The life in this body is an expression of God. The motion of the mind

is an expression of God. The greenness in a leaf or a blade of grass, the liquidity of water, the warmth of fire, are all expressions of God. Insects, inanimate objects, the elements, everything has its function and is fulfilling its role in the scheme of creation, which is being guided by the cosmic will. Realizing that the entire creation is an expression of the divine will and being able to perceive the transcendental nature in everything is the seventh aspect of bhakti.

8. *Contentment*: Contentment is the eighth form of bhakti. The same concept is the second niyama in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. When you are content, you are fulfilled and do not see the faults or mistakes of others. When contentment becomes the dominant quality in one's life, the nature is pure, complete, and needs nothing further added to it. When you are content, there is an inner stability; no desire for gain, no fear of loss, you are just being yourself.

The desire for gain comes when there is arrogance. Depression comes with loss, when you are not self-willed and lack self-confidence. When you are the natural you, at that time there is contentment. Externally, you are centred and balanced in both victory and defeat. At the psychological level the mind is properly harmonized and there is no ill-will towards anyone or anything. You do not see the shortcomings or the negativity. Everyone is expressing according to their level of education. In a school the children behave and act according to the class they are in. It is the same in the world. Each one of us is in a different class and our maturity is according to the class we are in. Finding a balance in the expressions of the mind, generating a feeling of inner contentment and experiencing completeness is the eighth form of bhakti.

9. *Let Thy will be done*: The ninth form of bhakti is 'Let Thy will be done', the final letting go of individuality, where you become an instrument that God plays upon. You have to become empty. Radha once asked Krishna, "Why do you love your flute more than me?" Krishna replied, "The whole world knows that I love you. Why do you ask?" "Because you

hold the flute to your lips all the time,” said Radha. “That,” replied Krishna, “is because the the flute is totally hollow inside, and when people empty themselves then I love them very dearly.” Allow yourself to become hollow inside, without any conflict, problems or difficulties; let go and become totally free. When you become free from self-created barriers, then you become the darling of God. You live according to the divine will and the feeling that comes is ‘Make me an instrument of Thy love.’

These are the nine stages of bhakti in which transformations take place in the realm of consciousness and mind, attitude and behaviour. The processes to attain these are said to be kirtan, mantra, chanting, contemplation, prayer and meditation. The aim of bhakti is to go through these nine steps one by one and to become established in the state of pure love where you are free from fear. Then you become one with God.

There are examples of people who have become one with God. There is the story of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. History says that at the time of his death he was dancing in front of Lord Jagannath, and the two became one. When the saint Kabir Das died, both the Muslims and the Hindus claimed him as their patron saint; yet when they removed the shroud, they found only flowers. Another example is the poet saint Mira Bai. At the time of her death, her body became light and merged with the statue of Krishna.

These are recorded events in history; such things do happen. In more recent times, when St Theresa of Avila went into ecstasy, the signs of the stigmata would appear on her hands and feet. When she came out of this state of ecstasy, the signs would disappear. That means the level of identification is so deep that even the body can change, for it is simply compressed energy. When that energy is freed, it becomes one with the divine energy. This is the miracle of understanding and living the belief of ‘Let Thy will be done’.

—1 January 2002

Why do we hesitate?

People hesitate for different reasons. Hesitation is internal. When a baby is born, the skin colour is quite evident. Similarly, in spiritual life each person has a nature which can be clearly recognized by the gurus. Recognition of that nature leads to an awareness or understanding of how far a person can go. There is no misunderstanding in recognizing the nature, just as there is no confusion in deciding the skin colour of a newborn baby.

Each person functions according to their particular nature. Whilst this nature is not evident in the normal behaviour or character, it can be perceived in a different way and educated to be receptive and true to the aim or direction that you have set for yourself in life. It is reflected in every kind of thinking, behaviour, attitude and performance.

When difficulties arise in performance, this is a clear example of the functioning of a particular nature. There are people to whom you can explain very clearly how you want things done, and when you ask them if they understand, they say yes, yet when it comes to the actual implementation, it is all crooked and topsy-turvy. It was not that you explained it incorrectly; rather, their nature could just go that far and not beyond.

Difficulties also occur in setting priorities. When the priorities are decided, there is no hesitation. When self-interest and the greater interest are not coordinated, there will be problems and confusion; however, when self-interest and the greater interest go together, there are no difficulties. For example, if you come to the ashram as a visitor, when you see something happen you will say, "Oh, that is not my area. I am only a guest here." While you may sympathize with and have a feeling for the ashram, until you develop a sense of belonging, you will not consider yourself to be responsible for anything that happens. However, the moment you develop a sense of belonging, even a shoe placed out of alignment will strike your eye.

Your own home belongs to you and you are responsible for it. When you go to a hotel, it does not belong to you and

you are not responsible for it. There is a shift in attitude. How you relate to the different situations you face is the factor that ultimately decides how you are going to be in life. Some people are able to fit in anywhere at any time without any adjustment difficulties. This is one type of nature. That nature is the factor observed by the gurus. What you can or cannot do is irrelevant; even a donkey can be trained to do many things that a horse can do.

Another factor to observe in yourself is whether, when you try to be useful to someone, you are doing so in order to make the other person happy. For example, when people are doing some work for me, their idea is to please me. However, that changes the entire concept, as they were asked to do some work for me, not to please me. When you are disconnected from the work and connected with self-interest, such as pleasing someone, you will not be able to do the work properly. Therefore, human nature is very complex and categorical answers cannot be given.

Human beings are not black and white; human existence is grey. We do not know where white ends and where black begins. We live in a grey world: our personality is grey, our mentality, emotions and attitudes are grey. Clarity cannot be found in logic, although people have tried. For example, what is the essence of the teachings of all those who profess to be jnana yogis, in relation to their nature, to themselves, their relationship with the cosmos, God, and the universe? Except for the person who has become realized, jnana yoga has not helped anybody. There are more hatha yogis, bhakti yogis and raja yogis than jnana yogis in the world.

When you are trying to understand human nature, there is a great difference between normal and actual understanding. For the uninitiated, the sun is a ball of fire, giving light and warmth. For a research scientist, the sun is a dynamic and complex composition of many different gases, chemicals, radiations, and so on. If you remove one item from the sun, the quality of light and warmth will change. In the same manner, there are two dimensions to logic. We

try to understand ourselves, our difficulties and the world around us through the tiny mind. The full mind, the total mind, is much bigger than our experience in our life. The tiny mind is the fraction of the mind that is thinking. The thinking mind is not even aware of the origin or nature of our thoughts. Thinking is an unconscious process; the tiny mind has no grip on understanding this process.

You come across many different ideas on ways to centre, motivate and inspire yourself; you have heard many satsangs, yet have you applied any of these ideas in your life? The tiny mind appreciates but it cannot adopt, it cannot become that. Therefore, the logic that we tend to use to help in knowing everything has a very minor role to play in our life scenario.

Effort plays the major role in one's life. We actually only have a forty-year lifespan. We prepare ourselves until we are approximately twenty, then we live our lives between the ages of twenty and sixty, which is about forty years. After sixty, we again sit back and observe life. Until the age of twenty we are learning about life, then for the next forty years we are involved, then for twenty years we step back. For the forty years, infinity becomes a big problem for our minds to handle. People go through physical, psychological and social traumas, for that temporary moment in infinity becomes the holder of awareness.

When that temporary moment becomes the holder of awareness, where is the expansion of consciousness? There is no expansion; rather, consciousness implodes towards the self. 'I' becomes the predominant factor, and that is known as maya. When you pinpoint a torchlight on an object in the dark, only the object is illuminated. That means all the energy of the torch is illuminating only one object. That happens with ourselves. We become so self-centred or self-aware that 'I' becomes the centre of the universe.

Even in spiritual life, when everything else is negated and you attain samadhi, who attains samadhi, you or other people? When you attain peace, who attains the peace, you or other people? When you attain moksha, who attains

moksha, you or other people? When you awaken kundalini, who awakens kundalini, you or someone else? Therefore, Patanjali yoga is for self-illumination, focusing the torchlight on one thing: the self. From the yamas to samadhi, that is the effort.

Just as you make this effort in your personal life, it can also happen in your communal, social, external life. Effort in the outer realm is the yogic way of life. When you are able to illuminate yourself, the consciousness begins to radiate outwards and you begin to educate yourself. As you educate yourself, a new dimension, a new level or stage of life begins. You are then recognized as somebody who has attained something, and the light radiates outwards. This is the process of success in life.

When you become a scientist, first you educate yourself, then you experiment. Sometimes the experiments are failures, sometimes successful. The rate of success decides how good a scientist you will become in the future. When you become a doctor you have to educate yourself before you start treating people. Sometimes you fail, sometimes you succeed. How good a doctor you are is decided by your rate of success in treatment, not by your degree or certificate.

It is the same in sannyasa. It is not the wearing of geru or the shaved head which decides whether you are a sannyasin or not; it is the rate of success and failure that decides how good you are. The rate of failure in sannyasa is so much greater because one thought, one obsession, one idea becomes magnified; as the torchlight is on 'self'-illumination.

In modern terminology, the purpose of yoga sadhana as described in the *Yoga Sutras* is to increase our rate of success as a yogi by doing what is right, appropriate and uplifting. You have to manage somehow on that level. This is a different perspective from the causes of hesitation. If we try to understand everything through the little mind, confusion will result.

When Swami Satyananda left the ashram he said very clearly, "Don't ask me about your problems any more. Read

my books. I have given the answers there. For so many years I have given the answers, now read it and do it!"

We tend to identify not with the solutions but with the problems. Therefore, when solutions are given they are not attractive, for our problems are more attractive. That is where we get stuck. Often people say, "Swamiji, this is my problem, and I don't know what to do." My reply is, "What is the solution? Do not come to me with problems, come to me with solutions." You will always face problems, but you have to train yourself to find solutions, therefore one just has to take the first step in being bold. Boldness implies that you begin to like what you know. Once that boldness comes, all the hang-ups go away.

—8 January 2002

Positivity

If there are two piles, one of gold and one of dirt, we will always choose the pile of gold. If the dirt and gold are mixed, we will separate the gold from the dirt. Yet, are we able to do that with ourselves? Our personality is a combination of both rubbish and gold, and generally we are affected by the rubbish and ignore the gold. Despite having so much to give, so much to receive and so many positive qualities within, we identify with the negative. The purpose of yoga is to separate the negative from the positive. The awareness must be deepened so that we are aware of the negative as well as the positive. We have to reject the negative and connect with the positive. Why do we react? Why do we desire one thing and not another? Reactions are a result of identification with negativity and dislikes. Actions follow positivity. This awareness has to dawn and develop.

It is not meditation or the performance of asanas that is important. After all, we can practise asanas only as long as we are fit. We practise meditation only as long as there is the desire. If there is no desire to practise yoga, we give it up. If we just revolve around our likes and dislikes, actions

and reactions, desires and rejections all our life, it means we have not learned the lesson. The lesson is to bring out the positivity. That positivity has to be expressed in every situation, whether it is an exam, a human relationship, social living or reclusive living. This is the understanding that yoga tries to give. This understanding cannot be intellectual. It has to be an experiential understanding of the process that leads to self-development and infuses one with contentment, peace and tranquillity.

We go through various experiences, some good, some bad. Whenever we react, it is a bad experience and whenever we accept and act, it is a positive experience. Positivity and acceptance have to be our focus if we want to succeed in life. If this focus is lost, we cannot claim to be practitioners of yoga, only practitioners of asana or meditation.

Change has to come from within. This is not a momentary gain; rather, it is a gain of positivity in life. The satisfaction or fulfilment we experience within is due to harmony, which is both external and internal. If we only identify with the inner experience of happiness, yet react externally in our attitudes, behaviour, relationships and communication, then that experience can never be complete. In the third sutra of the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali discusses being established in one's own nature as the seer, the *drashta*. To be established in one's own nature means there has to be harmony, a flow in life. That is the true meaning of yoga.

This optimism and balance does not encounter nor is it affected by blocks. A river will simply flow around a large rock on the river bed and carry on with its journey. It does not come into conflict with an immovable object. We all need to learn this lesson, for personal attainment is only a selfish subjective attainment, which can be lost at any time. It is easy to attain and also easy to lose, as life follows a principle of give and take. This is the flow of life with which yoga identifies.

At this stage yoga becomes a way of life, not just a practice. There is identification with, and expression of the

nature that is balanced, positive and optimistic, and one attains physical health, mental health and spiritual wealth.

—28 January 2002

According to the law of karma, our destiny depends on our karma in the previous life. Yet, what was our first karma that brought us into this world? Did we have any karma at all in our first period of life?

According to the theory of karma, every inherent cause has an inherent effect. Cause and effect are the two expressions of nature, the manifest or created world. The cause and effect of life is birth and death. Anybody who takes birth is going to die one day: that is the law governing life. Similarly, a seed contains all the genetic information of a tree. If the environment is right, the seed will become a mighty tree one day. If the conditions are not appropriate, it will remain a seed. If the seed does not become a tree, it does not mean that it is not affected by cause and effect. It means the karma did not get the right environment in which to express itself.

Our entire life is governed by karma; otherwise, we would not be here. Animals have a karma, humans have a karma, trees have a karma, the elements have a karma, the entire creation has a karma. The biggest karma is transformation. What does not change in the world is change itself. In fact, another name for karma is change: change in an existing pattern and in the generation of a new pattern.

In human beings, the seed of karma is desire. In animals it is instinct. Animals generate karma because of their instinctive nature. Sentient beings, such as human beings, generate karma because of desires; desires become the cause for the generation and expression of karmas. If one looks at the original karma from the point of view of yoga and the spiritual traditions, the cause of karma was the desire: *Ekoham bahusyamah* – “I am one, let me become many.” Therefore, human life and the karmas of human life are ruled and governed by desire.

Desire is also influenced by the conditioning of the society, culture, religion, and so on. It is this desire that one has to observe and analyze in the process of yoga. The only indication that exists in yoga to measure the process of spiritual development is the reduction of desires. With the reduction of desires, there is reduction of karma, and with the reduction of karma, there is the experience of inner freedom. Taking charge of one's life is the goal of all the traditions that advocate realization, moksha, nirvana or samadhi.

—2 February 2002

Swami Satyananda's yoga darshan

The yoga darshan or philosophy of Swami Satyananda is very simple. Since the inception of Bihar School of Yoga at Sivananda Ashram, Lal Darwaja, in 1963, Sri Swamiji, as a yoga teacher, taught courses and classes, ran therapy courses, yoga sadhana programs and teacher training courses. What was the purpose behind developing the sequences and components of yoga that he did? Why didn't he follow *jnana marga*, the path of jnana, as is the tradition of sannyasins?

In the process of developing yoga, Sri Swamiji's approach was the growth of the total human being, the homogeneous human personality. Homogeneity of the human personality lies in proper coordination, cooperation, association and expression of the qualities of head, heart and hands. It is as simple as that. This is the sum of yoga darshan as developed by Swami Satyananda.

From time immemorial, people have been plagued by one eternal question: how to deal with the mind? Arjuna asked Krishna the same question in the *Bhagavad Gita*. How does one deal with this mind which is more subtle than air and can never be grasped or held? Today we ask the same question. How can we manage our mind? How can we manage our desires, aspirations, thoughts and ideas? How can we give them a practical approach? How can we have

the clarity and perception of mind to understand what is relevant and irrelevant?

In view of these various aspects that trouble a human being, Sri Swamiji developed the complete system of pratyahara. Even today in society, people do not know the difference between pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Many teachers say they teach meditation without even understanding the concepts of pratyahara and dharana. Sri Swamiji defined the concept, the applicability and the techniques of pratyahara. He established yoga nidra as the first technique of pratyahara. He developed other systems of concentration and meditation which he found in the tantras. As a result, the techniques of antar mouna and ajapa japa evolved. Ajapa japa had been talked about for thousands of years; however, no one had actually defined the practice. Sri Swamiji clarified the stages of the practice and the movement of the breath and mantra in the psychic passages. He gave a practical, understandable and attainable concept and structure to each practice. He defined the stages of antar mouna, chidakasha dharana and yoga nidra.

Sri Swamiji was the first to describe the process, salient points and techniques of prana vidya which, in its elementary form, is known today as reiki. He introduced pranayama as a part of daily yoga sadhana. Twenty years ago people used to say that pranayama was dangerous. Other institutions did not teach pranayama as an integral part of a yoga class, only teachers of the Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga tradition did. The pranayama techniques you are learning today are the teachings of Sri Swamiji. Which pranayamas are heating, or cooling, or balancing; their effects on different states of the body, at different times of the day, in different climates, in different moods; how to develop the ability of the lungs to inhale, to exhale, to retain the breath: all this was addressed in the sequence as Sri Swamiji taught it.

Sri Swamiji explained and systematized the concept of bandhas and mudras. He simplified the entire system of hatha yoga shatkarmas by combining the techniques in one

simplified version: poorna shankhaprakshalana. Shankhaprakshalana is not found in other yogic literature, and basti, dhauti, nauli and neti are discussed as separate techniques.

There are only two systems of kriya yoga existing in the world. One has come down from Babaji, who, it is said, was the creator and the founder. There have been many teachers in that line, the well known being Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Yukteshwar and Lahiri Mahashaya. The other system of kriya yoga was discovered by Sri Swamiji from the tantras. When kriya yoga was a secret, with the belief that it could only be passed from guru to the most intimate disciple, Sri Swamiji started a three-year postal correspondence course, and the book that emerged from that is the only authentic encyclopedia of yoga in existence today.

Swami Vivekananda spoke on yoga, yet he never taught yoga. He never taught asana or pranayama; he only spoke in theory. He did not develop yoga; he only presented the scriptural, philosophical aspect of yoga in everyday language. It was Swami Satyananda who linked the yogic concepts to the body, for example, which chakra corresponds to which nadi, which gland, which state of mind. Many people have researched that subject. Dr Hiroshi Motoyama, in his book *Theories of the Chakras*, refers to the philosophy and practices of Swami Satyananda. Dr Serena Roney-Dougal, author of *Where Science and Magic Meet*, discovered the role, functions and benefits of the chakras and their correspondence with the psychophysiological system. Intellectuals and thinkers around the world have accepted and worked on these ideas.

The original APMB, which was published in 1968, had seventy pages. Today APMB has over five hundred pages; nonetheless, in the original content Swami Satyananda had described the physiological, psychological and spiritual benefits, the sequences we are following today and what has been discovered by medical, scientific and therapeutic research.

Swami Satyananda also developed a process for opening the heart and created a system through which it could be

done. He also created a system for developing the qualities of the hands, by insisting that Ganga Darshan is a gurukul, despite it having attained university status. This structure and discipline is not only an institutional mandate; it is to create an environment in which one can develop the qualities of the hands by being creative. Creativity is not dissipation. People often ask how they can be creative in the ashram when there is limited scope and areas for work, performance and living. There may be more options to be creative outside, but there are distractions too. For the training to become creative, one has to focus on one thing, digging one hole five hundred feet deep, not fifty holes ten feet deep.

Sri Swamiji says very clearly that he is what he is today because of what he underwent and experienced in his guru's ashram. That has made him what he is today. In his message to the participants of the Sannyasa Course he mentions that in his guru's ashram he lived with a passion for work. He emphasized the aspect of karma yoga and gave it a practical form, a body, and it became part of the ashram culture. Otherwise, karma yoga is only a philosophy: do the action and don't expect any results or fruits. Everyone talks about it; however, where is the place where you can confront your mind, your ideas, your nature, your perceptions, your conflicts? It is only when you face all this in the ashram that karma yoga becomes a part of life and you are able to change your perceptions and attitudes.

In due time, the aspect of the heart will turn into bhakti; not the blind bhakti, not idol worship, but bhakti in the form of a feeling, a connection, not only with God but with God manifest in each individual being. As Sri Swamiji's mission has evolved, we are also seeing different areas being developed. Sivananda Math is an expression of bhakti. Its activities may be classified as social service; however, the aim has been bhakti. Sri Swamiji has used the word *atmabhava*, oneness; not with God, which is too distant a reality, but with the touchable, palpable, physical God. By connecting

with the physical, there is the hope that there may be a connection with the transcendental.

Sri Swamiji is not developing a philosophy as Buddha or Mahavira or others did; he is showing a path. He is teaching and presenting a way of life in a practical form. I am not eulogizing him; I am appreciating the work and effort which was put into developing a complex system for the growth of head, heart and hands. Therefore, the development of yoga in today's age has been the effort of Swami Satyananda.

There are many excellent institutions in the world teaching hatha yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga or bhakti yoga, and each path, tradition or system has its own uniqueness and specialty. However, the most comprehensive and most defined yoga is Bihar Yoga, which has to be lived to be experienced, not learned in a classroom. That is the difference. We can learn yoga in a classroom situation anywhere in the world. There are many universities or schools offering yoga training, yet it is only intellectual. There are many centres and individual teachers who are teaching yoga throughout the world, but it is only a physical component, an hour of asana, pranayama and relaxation.

Swami Satyananda was the first to combine a direction for the development of the mind, a direction for the movement of the heart and a direction for the creativity of the hands: all three, keeping in view the development of human potential, consciousness and energy. Sri Swamiji gave yoga a new life, a new birth. He revived yoga; otherwise, it would have been lost. Therefore, he is the Patanjali of today. That has been his contribution. People today do not realize Sri Swamiji's contribution to yoga, but tomorrow they will know that he was the Patanjali of this age.

It should be the continual effort of every yoga aspirant and yoga teacher who passes through Ganga Darshan and undergoes training here to maintain the sanctity and sacredness of this yogic process, and to have the feeling that he or she can have a yogic life, a complete life, a full life. When there are mental problems, head-trips, interaction

and association problems, manage them. Use the knowledge, the training, the wisdom and the understanding that you are trying to gain and develop. The only message that Sri Swamiji has given is this: do not lose hope in yourself.

—8 March 2002

When a disciple lacks goals and asks the guru what to do, and the guru says, “Make your own decision,” then what should he do, because he feels too perplexed and confused to make any decision?

The question is simple, but the answer is not. When people ask the guru something, they ask how to do this, how to do that. Up to a point that is all right; however, there comes a time when your own sadhanas and practices should bring you to a stage where you begin to use your wisdom, your discrimination, your viveka, your vairagya. Once discrimination and wisdom become effulgent in you, you will find solutions to any problem. The problem is that human beings think with a one-track mind which always compares and analyzes situations, wants and interactions with the subtle idea or thought, ‘What will I gain from it?’

Our nature, our personality, is subject to likes and dislikes. Likes give us the experience of happiness, pleasure, joy, satisfaction and fulfilment. Dislikes are painful. Dislike is rejection. Therefore, like and dislike, known in yogic terminology as *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion, is the nature that controls the human mind. Now, when raga and dwesha are controlling the expressions of the human mind, then anything we think or plan or desire will be subject to the influence of like and dislike. In this condition of mind, neither guru nor God can give you wisdom. If your likes and dislikes are predetermined then even God’s words will not make any difference, as there is no acceptance. In cases like this, the guru tells you to decide what your focus and aim in life has to be, as the guru knows his suggestion will not be accepted.

This applies to everybody. The guru will only guide that person in whom he has implicit trust, knowing, 'This person is my responsibility.' Therefore, qualities of discipleship are more important than instructions from the guru. It is not important to find out the aim of your life from the guru or to seek solutions to problems from the guru. That is secondary. It is important to cultivate the qualities of discipleship in life.

If one is a true disciple then the guru's guidance is received every step of the way, for it becomes at times physical, at times mental, at times psychic, at times just words that one hears in meditation. However, if that awareness, that level of acceptance and surrender is not there, and the relationship with the guru is intellectual and satisfaction-oriented, it is better to find your own solutions in life.

—5 August 2002

If we don't want to live, what should we do?

People who do not want to live have no focus in their lives. It is necessary for each and everyone to have a specific focus, a direction, an aim. One has to strive to attain that aim and one has to be determined. The effort should not be half-hearted. One should have the *sankalpa shakti*, the willpower to achieve what one aspires for in life.

Life is successful and fulfilled when there is a focus. Life has no meaning when there is no focus. The focus should not be on having money, property, good friends and family. These are not the parameters of success in life. They are outcomes of your effort, outcomes of your wisdom and understanding, outcomes of your ability to manage situations and circumstances. Therefore, they cannot be the focus.

The focus at all times has always been transformation of the gross nature of the mind. Whether one is a renunciate or a person deeply engaged and involved in worldly activities, whether you are a yogi or a bhogi, a recluse or a social activist, success in life is attained only when the lower, gross and animal tendencies have been transformed into positive

qualities. If depression or frustration, dissatisfaction, social or financial problems become the cause of the desire to take one's life, then the soul is not free. The spirit remains bound by karmas, samskaras and desires, and that bondage of spirit is anti-evolution.

God did not give you life for you to take it away. God gave you life so you could learn to cherish it, respect it and use it for the welfare of everyone. The members of a family are concerned for each other's welfare. That is one stage. The same concern and care can expand to other people, to many people. That is another stage, where the quality of caring and nurturing expands to such an extent that the concept of one's family is not confined to the few who live nearby: husband, wife and children, but expands to encompass other people as well who are not your own. In that way the welfare of all becomes a selfless act and not a selfish act. True happiness comes with selfless action. There is happiness in selfish acts also, yet that is temporary. Stability of happiness is attained when one is able to perform a selfless act.

God has given us this opportunity, this life, to express the appropriate human qualities and to become the master of the environment, situations and circumstances, and not be a slave to them. Appreciation of human qualities, human strengths and weaknesses, becomes the trademark of life. When appreciation becomes the trademark of life, when there is focus in life, then life is fulfilled.

—8 August 2002

Swami Sivananda: unique visionary

We celebrate the 8th of September as the birthday of our paramguru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. Swami Sivananda represents a force of transformation in the chapter of humanity in the twentieth century. He was not only a sannyasin, a renunciate, a sadhu; not only a doctor, not only a good person; he was unique and outstanding in the pantheon of Indian sannyasins.

In order to live sannyasa, one has to be very clear that this path is taken to unite with the highest self within one. That is the purpose of sannyasa; not the adoption of a particular vocation, not to fulfil a cherished desire, not to become the member of a group. Sannyasa represents a process of upliftment, of realizing the dormant divinity within. This is the reason why people come to sannyasa.

Over a period of time in human history, sannyasa has been defined in different ways. For some it is a process of jnana yoga, knowing the self through the intellect. For some it is realizing the source inside by channelling the emotions through bhakti. For some it is realizing the harmony that can exist within, in the individual's microscopic world and life, the manifest world and life, and the divine, transcendental world and life; the harmony that can be experienced and lived in all these dimensions by balancing one's karmas. However, regardless of the path chosen, the aim of sannyasa has been to uplift oneself and realize the divinity within.

Swami Sivananda lived the life of a sannyasin and by doing so he became a light unto himself. He lived what he believed in, what he taught and preached. There was no difference between his actions and his innermost feelings. Maturity in spiritual life is like boiling a potato. In its natural form a potato is hard, but when you boil it in water, the natural, hard form is transformed into a soft form, which can be eaten and enjoyed. In the same way, in spiritual illumination it is the breaking down and splitting open of the hard shell of the ego that brings out the pure self.

In order to bring out the pure self, one requirement is to be simple in needs, thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. When the thoughts are complex and intricate, they cause frustrations and difficulties in adjusting to life. As a result, all human effort is directed to finding some balance in this disharmony, whether it is a search for the divine or a search for security, happiness, contentment, satisfaction, peace and fulfilment. Inner harmony and purity are reflected when one becomes simple, and not crooked and devious.

As you become simple, less selfish and egotistical, you become humble. Humility is a quality seen in the lives of luminaries in the world. Swami Sivananda represents this ideal. However, the outstanding quality that identifies Swami Sivananda from other beings is that he was a visionary.

A visionary is known as a *rishi*. In the course of spiritual development and growth, people go through different stages of becoming stable in the higher consciousness. Stability of higher consciousness is perceived as the manifestation of a character. This character identifies a person, whether one is a sadhu, a mahatma, a saint, a sannyasin, a siddha, a bhakta, a jnana yogi, a hatha yogi, or whatever else. A visionary, a rishi, is the highest form of illumination, for in that stage of having established an identity with the higher consciousness, one is able to foresee the events of the future. What one foresees indicates how humanity is going to develop, what track it is going to follow. Visionaries are able to ease the process, to smooth the path for future generations. Rishis have the qualities of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

Swami Sivananda was a rishi, a visionary who was able to foresee the needs of human society, how to preserve the humanness of humanity and how to maintain and develop human culture. While the sannyasa tradition belongs to the vedantic tradition, where the individual effort is to dissolve duality and establish oneself in unity with the Higher Self, Swami Sivananda chose the process and system of yoga to fulfil the needs of future generations. He trained his disciples in the systems of yoga and made each one a yoga master.

During the last century three names stand out in the world of yoga: Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. Swami Vivekananda presented the theoretical idea of yoga to the public. Swami Sivananda made yoga a practical subject which could be applied in people's lives, whether to manage one's health, one's confused mind, one's emotional personality, to go into deeper meditative states, or to excel in applying the yogic principles

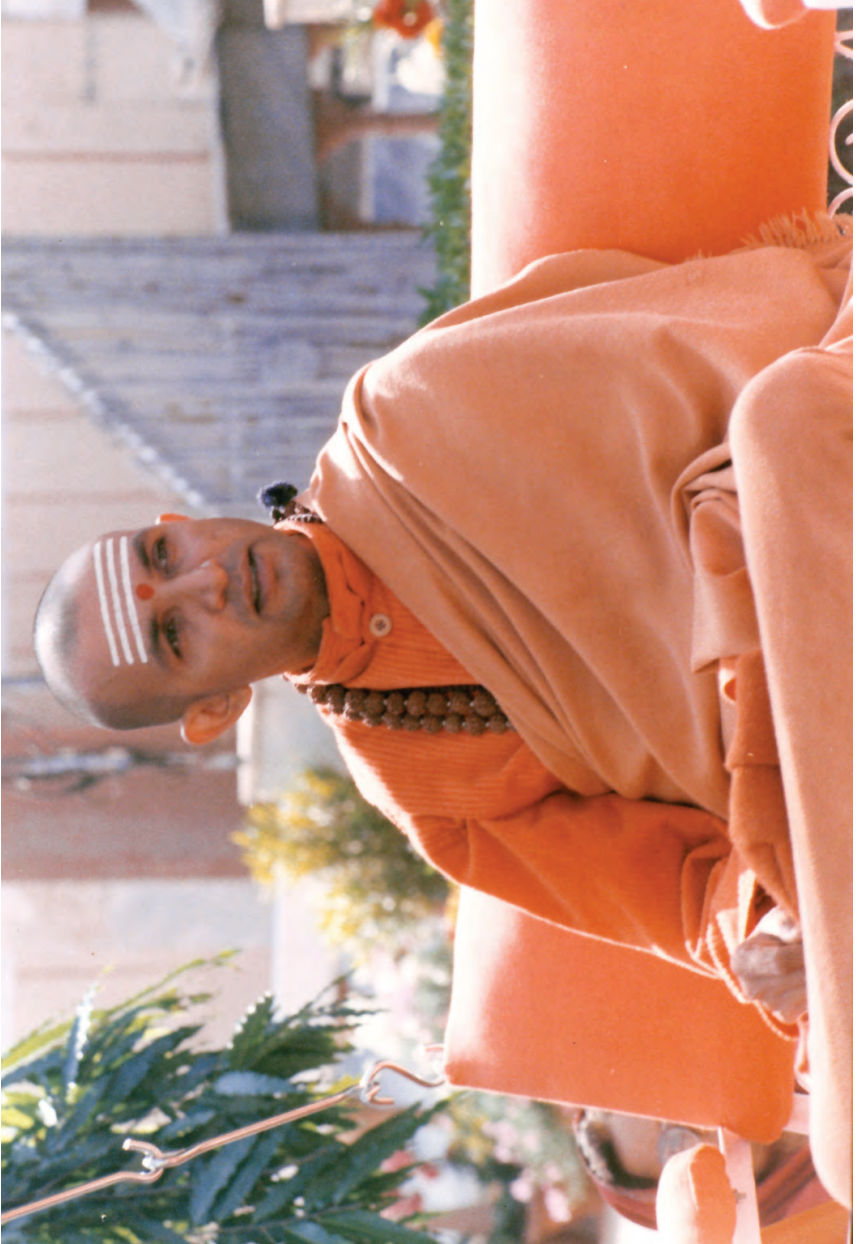
in a practical form through karma, through seva. Swami Sivananda brought yoga down to practical levels that could be accommodated by the human mind. Many people in the past had tried to do this; however, they could not differentiate between the essence of yoga and the garb of spirituality coloured by religious overtones. Therefore, despite their efforts, nobody was able to bring yoga down to a level where it could be understood and practised by everyone. Swami Sivananda did that in all spheres of life. He sowed the seeds of the yoga that emerged as a potential, as a possibility and as a solution to fulfil the vacuum in that particular dimension of life, and this work was carried on by his disciples.

Yoga was developed to its highest potential by Swami Satyananda, one of the bright disciples of Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda planted the seeds of yoga for the use of human society and civilization, and Swami Satyananda defined and explained the process of yoga in a scientific form. Swami Sivananda believed that it was the birthright of everyone to experience spirituality in a practical form: in action, in speech and in thought, in all of life's situations. Swami Satyananda further developed this philosophy into a system that is now being recognized as the holistic approach of Satyananda Yoga or Bihar Yoga.

Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda were not concerned with the development of yoga as a practice that people only did for an hour every day in the morning. They made yoga a part of the natural expression in life, to further develop and expand the horizon of the mind, to develop the human sensitivity to feel for others and to rise beyond petty egocentricity and arrogance, and develop the ability to adjust and accommodate.

It is a human trait to overlook righteousness for selfish reasons. In the face of friction, strife and tension, two people will overlook righteousness because selfishness overlooks the sensitivity of the situation. This is the biggest human folly. It is one area that has to be worked upon by expanding the horizons of human sensitivity. People get affected by

















others because they expect others to be as they are. People always try to find fault with others, not themselves. Why? Are we so afraid of ourselves that we don't want to recognize our weaknesses and faults? Is that our strength, is that our willpower, is that our clarity of mind? This is one reason why, despite their wisdom, human beings have not been able to develop their minds and feelings. What is known as spirituality is only an effort to ensure that one is able to develop the mind and feelings by a process of sadhana which can lead to inner transformation.

All the sadhus and sannyasins throughout the ages, from Prophet Mohammed to Jesus Christ, have advocated one basic component: live a righteous life. Living life righteously has been classified in different scriptures as part of different religions. However, how can living a righteous life be the subject of one particular religion and not of humanity as a whole? It is the subject of humanity as a whole, and yoga was made the medium to realize this by the rishis of this age.

It is the birthday of this rishi, Swami Sivananda, the visionary, that we are celebrating today. He was a towering spiritual personality, yet he was not a religious zealot. For him, the sutras of spiritual development were: regulation of the daily routine; maintaining constant awareness of the need for transformation by means of a spiritual diary; and bhakti, devotion to what you are involved in. In his life we see these three components coming together and blending beautifully to make him into a perfect being. The example he has set before us is that we can also become that being. We can also live that divine life by bringing these components together, and by forgetting our own egos, limitations, idiosyncrasies, ambitions and inability to adjust and accommodate. Adjustment and accommodation are considered to be the best virtues for a human being to have, either as a householder or as a sannyasin, because they lead to humility. Humility leads to natural learning, and it is natural learning that is the strength in life and the friend for life.

Today we celebrate in our memories and thoughts the birthday of this visionary, Swami Sivananda, with the sankalpa, 'Let us try to live that life which has inspired many to bring out the best in themselves.'

—8 September 2002

BIHAR YOGA BHARATI CONVOCATION ADDRESS

Today we have accomplished a chapter in the history of yoga. We are witnessing this particular moment in time after an interval of many thousands of years. There have been many convocations in India and around the world. However, what sets this convocation apart is that the education provided and the degree you have received here is not in a subject that falls in the normal social and academic environment, but it is a cultural, a spiritual and a yogic subject. This degree in yoga is cultural, spiritual and academic: all three. It is being awarded after a gap of many thousands of years to a group of students who have completed their education in the spiritual sciences. This event is historic.

Although the beginning of Bihar Yoga Bharati is small and simple, remember that a giant tree comes from a small seed. Today we are witnessing the sprouting of this seed, and the planting has been successful. Even confirmation from Lord Indra has been received, in the form of rain. When a seed is planted, you need to give it some water; not so much that it floods the ground and destroys the seed, but enough to provide it with humidity, sustenance and nourishment. This is what has happened today.

What has been the history of yoga in this present age? In the sixties the word yoga was almost unknown in India or abroad. It was only in the early 1970s that yoga came to society and became popular with the public, though for reasons of physical health, or with ideas of managing one's stress levels, and learning how to relax through the practices of yoga. Today yoga has become an international subject.

People from different walks of life, cultures, traditions and religions find solace and relief through yoga, whether physiological, psychological or spiritual.

The yogic wave

In the past there have been masters who have talked about yoga, but now yoga has emerged as a wave. In *The First Wave*, the writer Alvin Toffler spoke about the agrarian revolution which changed society. In *The Second Wave*, he talked about the industrial revolution which changed human life. In *The Third Wave*, he speaks of semi-autonomous societies, groups and cultures which will be self-sufficient and which will also have a strong psychological and mental character. Today, yoga is the fourth wave.

It is this yogic wave that will give an indication of what a human being can become. Whether you call that being a new man, or a superman, or a man of stable wisdom, a *sthitaprajna*, the fact is that yoga opens up different possibilities for the individual to experience that creative nature within. This creative change that we feel, experience and attain within eventually reflects in the betterment of human society and human civilization.

How can one progress in the material dimension, in the social environment, if there is no mastery, knowledge or understanding of one's own nature? Human civilization and human society has always aspired to achieve the best in life, yet the greatest failure of human civilization has been in the ability to know oneself. This is not a philosophical question. It is not even a spiritual discovery. If you live in a house, you have to know what is in it: which utensils are in the kitchen, what the contents of the bedroom and sitting room are. Just as we are aware of each and every item in our house as we live there, similarly, we have to be aware of each and every expression and experience of the mind, senses and body as we live here. That is something that has not been done so far. Our search for pleasure, happiness and satisfaction has been sensorial, sensual and external. We have negated those

aspects of our nature that can be cultivated and developed to bring forth a different expression of personality.

This new expression of human personality and nature, a homogeneous, balanced approach, is the yogic approach. Yoga does not aspire to make one religious. Yoga has presented clear ideas in believing, knowing and teaching that spirituality is different from religious behaviour. Spirituality is a connection with the inner spirit. It is a connection between the spirit and the mind. It is a connection between the mind and matter. The ability to creatively use the faculties of the senses, the brain, the mind and the spirit is what makes one a yogi.

In this context a yogi is a complete being. We have been fortunate in our lifetime to have encountered the teachings of great yogis, the saints and savants of the age. In every tradition, in every culture, in every civilization, such people who have become masters, who have attained unity of body, mind and spirit have come forward to indicate a way by which we can make ourselves creative and more enlightened. This journey of yoga in the last forty years has been the turning point in the history of humanity. From being a subject confined to yogis and sadhus in remote corners of the mountains, yoga has become a science, idea and practice which is being applied more and more at different levels of society for the improvement of personalities, mentalities, attitudes and habits. The ultimate aim? Becoming master of one's own life.

Becoming master of one's life

God is a distant reality in the life of a person. Strive to realize it, yes. Yet also know that the vision of God or the vision of the Higher Self is only an outcome of having attained creativity within. Just as a headache or hypertension are symptoms of a high stress level in the body, in the same way, God-realization or the vision of God is also an outcome, a symptom, of a person who has become creative in all dimensions of life. Therefore, do not think of God-

realization as being different from the effort we make to improve ourselves. If we say that God made man in His image, then definitely by looking at ourselves we will also discover who God is. It is no use saying, "I am God," because you are not God. In order to experience that godly nature there has to be a different quality within you. As long as gold contains impurities it cannot be an ornament. Only when the gold has been fired, the impurities removed and a shape given can that raw gold be appreciated. In the same way, we are the raw gold; we have not yet been fired, the impurities have not yet been removed. We are just a lump of gold in the ground; the jewellery is yet to be made.

This idea is expressed in Indian thought. A blind man wants to see the sun, yet is seeing the sun the priority of a blind man? It may be his desire, his cherished aspiration, but it is not his need. His need is not to see the sun, but to have sight. If that blind man acquires sight, he can look not only at the sun but at the entire creation and admire its beauty. In the same manner, God-realization can be our wish, our cherished desire, but not our need. Our need is to be able to manage the conflicts that disturb our peace and success. The moment we are able to manage our inner conflicts, confusions and complexes, and develop truthfulness, honesty, integrity, humility, compassion and love, we will experience the divine nature.

This is the vision of yoga: develop eyes. If we are blind then our effort should be to ensure that we have sight. We are all blind, obsessed by our own egos. We are blind due to our own creations of ideas, concepts and beliefs. We build a house, yet we close the windows and doors and we live inside the house in total isolation. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "In my house I want the windows and the doors to remain open so that the winds of different cultures and creeds can flow through." This is the statement of a person who aspires for openness, integrity and homogeneity in life. This is what we have to become. This was the inspiration given by our paramguru, Swami Sivananda.

The same inspiration and vision was carried forward by his competent disciples, one of them being our own guru, Swami Satyananda.

Develop humility and compassion

In this journey of yoga, with the awarding of degrees to the successful candidates, we have taken a step in furthering that vision of the saints of India. This degree in yoga represents your inclination to live and believe in a lifestyle and idea that is transcendental and yogic. You all had the opportunity to take up any profession, to go to any university in the country, to study any subject you wished. Why did you choose yoga? Whatever your reasons may be for choosing yoga, now that you have the degree and a growing understanding of what yoga is, the seed that has been planted in you will grow. In order for the seed to sprout, the seed has to die. In order for a yogi to emerge, the self-centred ego has to die.

Satyam vada – “Speak the truth”, has no meaning if the ego is not dead. *Dharmam chara* – “Walk the righteous path”, has no meaning if the ego is alive. As the recipient of the degree, now you have to ensure that you kill your ego gracefully. That can happen by developing humility, integrity, serenity, honesty, truthfulness, love and compassion. *Vidya dadati vinayam* – “Knowledge gives humility.” The way to overcome ego is through humility. Nature provides the example. The tree which stands upright during a storm usually breaks in two and the blade of grass which bends in a storm can survive a thousand storms. It is humility and compassion that are used as instruments to develop a pure personality.

Today’s Convocation Day of Bihar Yoga Bharati is sankalpa day. You have received the degree; may it brighten up the space above your mantelpiece. However, after you hang your degree on the wall, what will happen? Does it only remain a showpiece? No. You have to prove to be worthy of the degree before you die. If you can prove your worth before you die, you will inspire many others to recognize

their worth, and that is the greatest service that you, as yoga practitioners, can do for others. Help people to recognize their worth, help people to recognize their inner strength, and to use these for the creation of a better life, a better society and a better community.

It was Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, our paramguru, who originally envisioned the idea of a yoga university for the benefit of humanity. Swami Satyananda then brought forth the sankalpa to fulfil his guru's wish through creating the Ganga Darshan complex, and with his blessings and guidance we can say that this sankalpa has truly come to fruition: the university is now firmly established, and the future remains bright and promising as BYB continues to mature and expand.

My heart is full because I have been looking forward to the first convocation of Bihar Yoga Bharati since its foundation. Today the successful MA and MSc candidates for 2000–2002 have received degrees from Bihar Yoga Bharati. In this convocation, degrees have also been given by TM Bhagalpur University to the 1998–2000 and 1999–2001 candidates. I am sure that the goodwill of everyone will continue to inspire you to live the yogic life and to walk the yogic path. It is with gratefulness to the inspirers of our tradition, Sri Swami Sivananda and Sri Swami Satyananda, that I wish you all the best and success in your life, and may you fulfil the aspiration of ancient India: *Atma deepo bhava* – “Be light unto yourself.”

—8 November 2002

Is there a difference between seva and karma yoga?

Seva and karma yoga are two different things. *Karma yoga* is learning how to harmonize the day-to-day activities, behaviour and attitudes, and finding your inner peace while performing all your duties and activities. *Seva* is serving others with compassion and with the best you can give. Both seva and karma yoga are taught in the ashram.

What is karma yoga? *Karma* means action, and everyone is subject to karma; one cannot live without activity. It is a process that is subtle, physical, and continuously happening; it is being performed by the senses, the mind, the emotions, and also by the spirit. Yoga is harmony, integration. Therefore, when yoga is harmonizing and integrating all the dimensions of performance and action, that is karma yoga.

We all perform actions for different reasons and each action is guided by an attitude. Two people can have different attitudes to the same job. One can think the job is a burden, the other that it is a joy. While both people are performing action, the attitude changes the properties and quality of the action. Which one is able to understand karma? The person who sees it as a joy is in a better position to appreciate the particular karma and to ensure that it is being done with their total heart, understanding and feeling; whereas the person who sees the job as a problem will not be able to give his or her one hundred percent to that action. When one is able to look at all jobs equally, with the same feeling, when one is at total ease with a job, whether working at a desk or cleaning the toilets, and there is peace of mind, then that is karma yoga. You have attained harmony in your actions. This harmony is between mind and body: the body and senses performing the actions and the mind encouraging that action.

Karma yoga works at the attitudinal level, trying to change the perception of selfish activity into selfless activity. It tries to change the influence and effects of the activity from being self-oriented to universally-oriented. This attitude has to be applied not only logically, but in action. Karma yoga is connecting with activity, not thinking one is above the activity, for then the ego comes in. The ego says, "Oh, why should I do that? Others can do it!" In karma yoga the attitude of selflessness becomes more dominant. By nature karmas are selfish. When the word 'yoga' is added to karma, it changes the quality from selfish to selfless. For this reason, it is said that selfless karma is karma yoga.

Seva is different. There is no word in English that really defines seva. Service is not seva. Seva is serving and helping others with compassion; serving not for personal gratification but to uplift others. Seva is not meeting your own aims, but offering that service as *homa*, an offering in the yajna of life. Seva contains the best there is in you. When it is offered to another being and it contains your best thoughts and feelings, your love and affection, sympathy and compassion, then that action becomes a blessing to uplift another being. That is seva.

In the ashram both seva and karma yoga are taught. Many people who come to study yoga are totally unused to the concept of karma yoga and find it an effort, a struggle. If we tell them, “This is your duty”, they say, “I have not come here for that; I have come to get my degree, I have come to educate myself.” There is a rejection of karma yoga because they see it as hard physical labour, yet once they understand the process of karma yoga and how it helps to change their own perceptions and attitudes and to develop their own creativity, in the course of time they begin to like it. By the time they leave the ashram, they are heart and neck deep into karma yoga.

This experience of karma yoga is taken to another dimension in Rikhia, where karma yoga becomes seva. Those who can understand that process become further inspired and motivated. Then seva becomes a way of life. Living for others and not for oneself becomes a way of life.

That is the difference between karma yoga and seva. Initially in the ashram, in order to deepen the experience of karma yoga, one has to add the component of seva yoga. First you practise karma yoga then you move into seva. You continue to do the same jobs, whether typing letters or working in the kitchen, but the attitude, the idea, changes from karma yoga to seva. Then you see the beautiful canvas that karma yoga and seva yoga together can create in the life of an individual.

—18 December 2002

2003

How can we apply pratipaksha bhavana?

Pratipaksha bhavana has been defined in the *Yoga Sutras* as thinking of the opposite quality in relation to the attitudes one develops and expresses in day-to-day situations. Attitudes such as envy, jealousy and competitiveness all lead to the development of a particular type of human expression, which involves a change in the total personality. Jealousy, for example, begins as an idea; however, you begin to feel an emotion, which is termed 'jealousy'. In the experience and expression of that jealousy your logic and intellect, *manas* and *buddhi*, are involved. You continue to brood over the same thing. The *indriyas*, the senses, are involved, finely tuned to respond to that situation. Your performance is influenced: how you act, behave, think and express yourself changes.

As the envy, which developed as an idea, becomes the predominant nature of the mind, it will give rise to altered states of perception. That jealousy can turn into animosity. It can change the entire personality so that one is geared up and ready to ensure the downfall of another person. In this way, changes happen in the psychology of a person: in the emotions, logical understanding and behaviour.

Pratipaksha bhavana, developing the opposite quality, is ensuring that you are not influenced and affected by that strong feeling, sentiment or emotion. If there is aggression,

in your mind you develop friendship. You do not have to interact with the person you consider your enemy, but in your mind, in your sentiments and understanding, that person can cease to be an enemy and just be an ordinary person. The result of pratipaksha bhavana is becoming free from the influences of a negative trait by developing a positive trait.

How can pratipaksha bhavana be applied? By trying. If you fail, it is an achievement for the simple reason that you tried! If you succeed, it is your crowning glory: you achieved! Applying pratipaksha bhavana has to be done with the right understanding: with dispassion, detachment and discrimination. *Viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and dispassion, develop the sattwic nature, which expresses itself, not in the form of self-rebuke and guilt, but in the form of encouragement.

—3 March 2003

What should I do with anger when it comes? I tend to repress my anger and often get depressed, not knowing that I am angry. Intellectually I understand that my feeling of sadness may come from unexpressed anger, but how can I express it?

Anger is a violent reaction. It may be the outcome of any issue, major or minor. In the state of anger, which has clouded your understanding, perception and logic, which has altered your body chemistry so that you are sweating and trembling, your face is flushed, your blood pressure is high and your breathing is shallow, you have subjected yourself to a violent expression of an emotion. That emotion is a reaction.

Generally one thinks about the anger only after one has expressed it. Very few people think while they are angry. If you reflect upon the nature of your anger and analyze the cause of the reaction, then continued performance of this awareness will eventually develop the time span of awareness,

and then even at the time of feeling angry you will be aware of that anger and be able to alter it. As sadhana, one should practise antar mouna. During antar mouna, pick a cause of affliction and go to its source. You will find that the affliction you are feeling is a reaction that can bring up different kinds of emotions: sometimes anger, sometimes frustration, sometimes just feeling hopeless. Witness that.

Suppressed anger is the worst form of anger because it means restriction of emotional expression. People who cannot express emotions have psychological hang-ups of one type or another. That psychological hang-up becomes their personality, their nature, their attitude. Again the solution is to witness the suppressed anger in meditation. Mantra helps to bring out the suppressed anger. Once you are able to bring to the surface of your mind the reason for your unhappiness, and you have enough mental clarity to work to improve that reason, you will find a change in the intensity of the aggression and anger.

—3 March 2003

How can one distinguish between action and inaction, and how can it be understood through intellect, through logic?

Action is being the participant and inaction is knowing that you are not the doer. According to philosophy, inaction does not mean becoming blind, negating or turning away from action. Inaction means that you become the witness of your actions and realize that you are not the doer, not the enjoyer. The emphasis is not on inaction; rather, it is on becoming the witness of the activity, with the realization that, ‘I am not the doer.’

If I am not the doer, then who is the doer? Is God the doer? Is the self the doer? Are the samskaras and karmas influencing our idea of doership? Is our ego the doer? The answer is very simple and has been given in the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the other scriptures. We are under the influence of maya. Maya is identification

with the ego principle. That is the simplest definition of maya. It is the ego that creates our realities. This is where a concept, an idea, takes a practical form because the ego then determines how you will act. In anger, the ego determines that your actions will be volatile and aggressive. In hatred, jealousy, greed, envy, affection, sympathy, in everything, it is the ego that decides how you are going to behave. This totality is maya.

Under this influence, we are going to pass through phases of interpreting the aspect of action in different ways: in relation to karma, in relation to our mental, sensorial and cultural conditionings. This is very difficult to understand because there is a psychology governing each person. One is continuously performing, acting: the kriya aspect. Kriya is loosely translated as action; however, *kriya* is an ongoing momentum. Just as when you dive into a river the current helps you to swim, similarly, when you throw yourself into action, it is the current of action, the kriya, which then propels you. Throw yourself in the pool of anger or hatred and see what kind of kriya propels your thoughts, your motivation, your actions at that time.

Becoming the *drashta*, the witness, and then eventually controlling the karma, leads to the state of inactivity in action. That is the state of God today, on this date, at this time. He is totally inactive, yet all the action is happening. Look at your spirit. Your spirit is inside, totally inactive, and yet all the actions are happening through the agency of the mind and the senses. Just as the spirit is inactive, God is also inactive. In order to allow God to function you have to deactivate the senses, external and internal.

Two eyes see duality; one eye sees unity. When one eye sees unity and it opens, everything that is the cause of duality is burnt out. When the eye of unity is closed and the eyes of duality are open, one is subject to maya, one is subject to karma. The human effort is to move from their influences, which hold one down, and to experience greater and higher qualities by learning how to manages one's ego, which is

the first manifestation of maya in the form of individual experience.

—10 March 2003

What is yoga?

The appropriate answer is that we are still discovering what yoga is. We know the practices of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and so on; however, we have not yet discovered what yoga is. The literature says that the aim, the culmination, of yoga is in samadhi. What is samadhi? Can that state be defined by the intellect, by logic, by rationality? Or is it a state of being? Right now we are on the path of becoming, yet only when we reach the state of being, and we have become, will we be able to understand what yoga means.

With our present understanding, yoga is a process of developing, as well as awakening and activating, the different qualities of life. That is the first focus of yoga before we even attempt to reach the state of samadhi. Samadhi is a very distant reality, a very distant dream in our lives. In order to come to that level, there are many conditions we need to fulfil and many preparations that have to be made. Therefore, we are talking not of the aim of yoga but of the preparations we need to make in order to experience yoga.

These preparations are tuning the lifestyle and the life process. In order to hear a radio station, you need to tune into the right frequency. In the same way, to understand something transcendental with a non-transcendental mind, you have to make the effort to transform the quality of the mind so that eventually you can become a transcendental being.

The first tuning we need to perform in yoga is known as development of awareness: slowly, gradually and practically expanding the horizons of personal awareness from being self-contained to being more expansive.

The second condition of yoga is to become aware of the inner strengths and not to identify with the normal

weaknesses. The tendency or nature of the mind or personality when acting in the world is tamasic and rajasic. *Tamas* is the conditioned mind, the conditioned self, having a closed mind, not accepting new values or concepts, not being free to explore new horizons or frontiers, just being content with one's own ideas, beliefs, systems, thoughts, lifestyles, and so on. *Rajas* means dominance, overpowering conviction, and the assertiveness of 'I am right' to boost one's ego, self-image and prestige.

Tamasic and rajasic behaviour is restricted and limiting. It does not allow the expansiveness of the self to manifest. That is visible in our life. If there is a problem facing our mind and we go somewhere new, despite being in a different, happy atmosphere, the same thought is like a magnet at the back of the head. The problem persists and we are conscious of it. There is never full participation in the other event that is taking place. We are separate from the event in which we want to participate, yet cannot.

The conditionings of the rajasic and tamasic natures give birth to a sensorial identity, and that sensorial identity is the problem. The body is the medium through which we interact with the world: through the senses, with the conscious, the subconscious, the memories. These interactions trigger off different expressions of the senses and mind. Each one is identified by a specific mood, in which we are either elated or depressed, content and happy or frustrated and anxious. According to the mood, our relationship with the outside world changes. When we are happy we see the world as a happy place. When we are sad we see the world as a horrible place. This mood is total identification with the senses, leading to the experience of *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion. Due to attraction and non-attainment of the desired object, anger is again created. This process is defined in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62–63):

*Dhyaayato vishayaan pumsah sangasteshoopajaayate;
Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah kaamaatkrodhobhijaayate.*

*Krodhaad bhavati sammohah sammohaat smritivibhramah;
Smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashaat pranashyati.*

Desire for an object creates attachment. Unfulfilled attachment leads to aggression, frustration and anger. When one is experiencing anger, frustration and aggression, the wisdom becomes clouded. When the wisdom is clouded, the ability to make the right decision, to know right from wrong, disappears. When one does not know what is right and wrong, the intellect dies. The death of the intellect is the death of the person, of the being. This is the statement of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

By developing the positive, uplifting qualities of life, by finding our strengths and not our weaknesses, we can come to the point of being a *sthitaprajna*, one of steady wisdom. *Prajna* is wisdom, applied knowledge. *Sthita* means still, balanced, harmonious. In the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:54), Arjuna asks Krishna, “What are the symptoms of a person who has attained balanced wisdom? How does a person endowed with such qualities live on earth: how does he walk, think, behave and act?” Krishna answers in a very simple manner: “That person walks on earth just like you and me. That person eats just like you and me. That person sleeps just like you and me. The only difference is that you are identified with the world and one with stable, steady wisdom is identified with the Self.” The world represents the tamasic and rajasic nature; the Self represents the sattwic, luminous nature. Therefore, identifying with the positive qualities, with one’s strengths, is the second mandate of yoga.

We cultivate and adopt positive qualities and attitudes through the practices of yamas and niyamas. The yamas are: *satya*, truthfulness; *ahimsa*, absence of violence from the human personality, from the mind; *asteya*, not desiring to obtain; *aparigraha*, being non-possessive and non-accumulative; and *brahmacharya*, being aware of the higher consciousness guiding your life.

The niyamas are: *shaucha*, purity of body, mind, speech, thought and action; *santosha*, contentment, restraint of the desires and the senses; *tapasya*, the desire for change, being ready to go through any process in order to change and become better in life; *swadhyaya*, awareness of how the body, mind, senses and the highest consciousness interact with each other; *Ishwara pranidhana*, living according to the divine will, having faith in the Self. Whether you define ‘Self’ as God or as your self is up to you; however, you exist, so have faith in that existence, which is eternal. If you do not want to use the word God or the word Self, use the word ‘existence’.

Yamas and niyamas are the keys with which a human personality is tuned to sattwa. These are the keys by which a human personality can be tuned to ahimsa, to satya, to asteya, to aparigraha, and so on. Attainment of each of these qualities will nurture the spirit. Just as the body is nurtured by food and the mind by happiness, the spirit is nurtured by the appropriate, positive, uplifting expression of these qualities. When you do something good you feel happy for a long time. You feel elated, spontaneously, naturally, without any external aid at all. That is an example of how a positive, uplifting quality can change and enhance your perceptions, motivations, expressions, creativity and efficiency. Therefore, the second mandate of yoga is learning to manage the tamasic and the rajasic, and tuning to sattwa.

Yoga is a process of becoming. We try to experience this process, which leads to that state of being where we exist as our true selves, where we have identified with the sattwic aspect of our life. In the process of becoming we adopt the different methods, techniques and practices of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, nada yoga, mantra yoga, laya yoga, and the many other paths of yoga described in the tradition.

The branches of yoga include practices that can lead us to perfection of that particular quality, ability, efficiency or creativeness which we acquire from within ourselves. It is not acquired from outside. Once a sculptor was asked, “How

do you carve a beautiful statue out of a bare piece of rock?” He replied, “That beautiful image is already contained in the rock. I simply remove the unnecessary pieces.” That is the process of becoming a yogi. We begin to remove the unnecessary parts from our lives, from our nature, from our personality that create a conditioning which then overpowers every thought, every behaviour, every action that we perform. It is like a magnet attracting iron filings. The conditioning is that magnet which attracts the iron filings of thinking, behaving, expressing, communicating, desiring, liking, not liking, happiness and sadness, euphoria and depression, and so on.

Swami Satyananda used to call this process ‘removing the dross’. Remove the unnecessary and the undesirable; retain, cultivate and develop the desirable. Learn to adjust and adapt. In this way, develop the ability to eliminate the tamasic and rajasic negative impressions that bind you to the gross plane of consciousness, and become more identified with that inner intuition which is based on *nyaya*, justice, and *dharma*, virtue.

That development of the human personality, the establishment of *sattwa*, the attainment of the luminous quality in your life, a better perception, a better understanding and a better expression, is the beginning of the human journey.

—16 April 2003

What is faith? What faith should one have in life?

What is more important: love or trust? You can love a person without trusting that person. It is not necessary for both to go together. That means that you are thinking of love yet not giving your total. That total is trust. When you trust somebody, that is beyond love, for in that trust you have given something of that total and there is no barrier between you and the other person. In love there is not total giving; rather, that love becomes the cause of total bondage and

further conditioning. It acts like an agent to bring out the negative qualities: jealousy, possessiveness, aggression. Most people have experienced love in this manner.

Similarly, faith is not something you can conceptualize or intellectualize. It is something you have. Just as you are endowed with life in this body, you are endowed with faith in this body. Life itself is faith. No one is born without faith. You live because of your faith. However, faith has been misrepresented and misinterpreted as the placing of something in some object, in some receptacle, in some being. That is where the concept of faith has not been true to its aspiration.

Faith is an expression of your innocence combined with wisdom and trust in something. That trust has to be in yourself, as trust in yourself is trust in the qualities you have inherited and are cultivating and developing. If you want to be loved, be pleasant to everyone. If you want to be disliked, be rude to everyone. It is as simple as that. If somebody is rude then that person cannot be loved, no matter how hard one tries. If somebody is pleasant then without effort there is a feeling of affection and love.

Having faith in yourself, believing in what you can be and what you are, is the first step in the cultivation of faith. Believing in what you are should be without the shadow or colouring of the ego, without the shadow of doubt and without the shadow of arrogance in one's strength, ability and achievement. That is the condition.

The classic example is Hanuman in the *Ramayana*. Heroes are very proud of themselves. Hanuman was the greatest warrior who lived, but he was not proud of his prowess. On the seashore there was a discussion as to who could cross the ocean. One monkey said, "In my young days I could, but now I'm a bit old." What is reflected there? Pride in the past. Another said, "I can cross, but I don't know if I can come back again." What is reflected there? Self-doubt. Somebody said, "I will go halfway and fall straight in the ocean." What is reflected there? Inferiority complex. Only

Hanuman sat quietly and passively. Jamvant, the old bear, asked him, “Why are you so quiet? Out of all of us you are the only one who can cross the ocean and return. You don’t know what your powers are. Get up and make an attempt.” Meekly and obediently Hanuman got up, made the attempt and was successful. That is innocence combined with wisdom and giving your total trust, which is faith.

There is the old adage that faith can move mountains. Faith is cultivated by becoming aware of oneself in the right perspective, without anything that sways you to the minus side or the plus side. You are able to maintain harmony. Maintenance of that harmony is described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as *samatvam yoga ucchate*, total wholeness, harmonious wholeness.

As a spiritual aspirant, that is the aim one can adopt in life. That should be the sankalpa: to cultivate and develop not only faith but trust, not only trust but strength, not only strength but wisdom, not only wisdom but understanding, not only understanding but also awareness, the ability to see. This is the complete circle of yoga.

—21 April 2003

What is the difference between self-awareness and self-realization? How can a person transcend self-awareness into self-realization? What is the relationship between ego and self-awareness?

There is one mind, yet this mind has two different states of experience: manifest and transcendental. The manifest is dark; the transcendental is luminous. It is like night and day. At night, when we turn off the lights, what can we see in the darkness? The world continues to exist, yet it is merged and hidden in blackness. If we shine a torch, it illumines a small area and we are again able to distinguish shapes and colours. Otherwise, we cannot see any colours in the darkness. Once the night goes away and the sun comes out, we do not just see an isolated area illumined by the light of a torch; rather,

we can see right up to the horizon. That is expanded vision; there is no absence of light.

This is the difference between self-awareness and self-realization. Self-awareness is the light of the torch illuminating different pockets of darkness. This awareness fluctuates; it is not in control. The *drashta* or witness is there, but it does not have any influence over our actions and reactions. We work with this fluctuating awareness to make it firm, yet it remains confined to one individual illuminated area. However, with self-realization we can see right up to the horizon in total daylight. Self-realization is where our vision is expanded, where our consciousness becomes that expanded experience and is not confined to an individual torchlight.

—24 June 2003

In the *Ramayana* we learn that when the earth was overburdened with evil and could no longer bear the weight, Rama was born to relieve the suffering. It seems that today the earth is going through the same suffering again. Will another Vishnu avatara be born to relieve the planet?

This question can be answered in two ways: firstly, at the level of avatara and secondly, at the level of the individual human being. Mythologically, the Vaishnava tradition speaks of various avatars or incarnations of Vishnu. In the trinity of gods in the Indian pantheon, Brahma is the creator, Shiva is the destroyer and Vishnu is the preserver. Vishnu has been given the mandate to sustain and nourish creation, and the maintenance of creation is a multidimensional activity. The strength and the mental energies of many beings have to be stimulated, nourished and kept alive. The subtle energies and states of consciousness continue to interact with each other in the subtle and psychic dimensions. Therefore, there is a need for maintenance at both microcosmic and macrocosmic levels.

Vishnu takes birth to change the negative tendencies and to establish joy and righteousness. Ten avatars have been

described in the *Bhagavata Purana*: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Ramachandra, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Nine avatars have appeared, the ninth being Buddha only 2,500 years ago. The tenth, Kalki, is awaited and will come at the end of Kali Yuga, which is still a long way away. We are at the beginning of Kali yuga, which has a very long cycle of 432,000 years.

The process which brings joy into people's lives and the process which establishes dharma is expressed differently in each avatara. Buddha used the instruments of serenity and adherence to the ideals of non-violence and peace, *ahimsa* and *shanti*, patience and forgiveness, *dhairya* and *kshama*, to deal with the negative tendencies existing at that time. This approach and attitude was adopted by many other luminaries of the past.

A radical, lord-like approach was adopted by Parashurama who, according to mythology, wiped out twenty-one generations of the ruling class. Then Lord Krishna appeared and expressed love for life. He said that happiness is not alien to spiritual life, that you can live a full life and be spiritual at the same time. Therefore, different methods have been adopted by different avatars to bring joy, to establish dharma and to deal with the prevalent environment and situation of the time.

We also need to look at the role of the individual in eradicating suffering. First, we have to define what is evil on earth. Why is there suffering? What are the causes? Many thinkers, seers and aspirants have conceived of different processes to eradicate human suffering and find solace, peace and fulfilment in life. Historically, the outcomes of their thoughts and understandings have been religions, which have developed the idea that peace can be attained through connection to God, through bhakti and surrender. Religious ideas, including those of *tyaga*, renunciation, and *tapasya*, austerity, indicate this drive and motivation. These different processes lead to the eradication of suffering in life, the root of suffering being the human mind.

The earth has the potential to create anything. That potential can be depleted by misusing the earth and increased by uplifting the earth's energy. Similarly, there are virtues in the mind, yet the negative tendencies of tamas cloud the virtuous, wisdomful aspect of sattwa. The thought processes and ideas, which became entrenched in people's memories as religions, belief systems, philosophies or lifestyles, are an attempt to alleviate suffering. As individual suffering is alleviated and the mental tamas is reduced, not only God, but also human beings must play their role in the eradication of evil.

Human nature is very resilient; it can survive. It can find its peace, then be hypnotized by the next achievement and become disturbed, then again find its peace, until hypnotized by the next success and the rajasic effort to maintain that success, and again find peace. The human mind is not a rigid force. The cause of suffering is the tamas of the mind. Tamas, rajas and sattwa are the constituents of prakriti or nature. These three qualities are intertwined and combined in all the spheres of creation and in each individual personality. Sattwa, rajas and tamas are the natural evolutes contained in the process of creation and evolution. Therefore, it is not only avatars but also the individual human being who has a role to play in the eradication of suffering from life.

—24 June 2003

LIVING YOGA

Welcome to all the new students who have come to Ganga Darshan with the idea of learning yoga. What makes us happy is the knowledge that when you leave, you will take with you not only an understanding of yoga but yoga as part of yourself. This is the real Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga.

The roots of yoga are ancient, yet the history of yoga is less than half a century old. Swami Sivananda was one of the first sannyasins to recognize the potential divinity of

individuals. He trained his disciples in the systems of yoga and Vedanta, and most became luminaries who have inspired people to rediscover themselves and adopt yoga.

There have been many thousands of teachers who have picked up one component of the yogic system and propagated it as their belief, philosophy and livelihood. Some adopted the system of hatha yoga, harsh physical discipline; some the reclusiveness of raja yoga, intense meditation, tapasya and self-control; some the path of bhakti. Whatever the path, it was adopted more as a belief and as something to be experimented with rather than as something that could become part of one's life, something that had the power to transform human nature from the external, mundane and gross to something much deeper, higher and transcendental.

In the last half of the 20th century, the individual branches of yoga, such as hatha yoga, jnana yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, mantra yoga, and so on, were developed rather than the main trunk and root of yoga. Developing the main trunk and the root means incorporating the yogic principles not only as ideology but also into one's life. Experiencing that lifestyle in which yoga becomes a part of oneself is identified either as classical yoga, or the Bihar Yoga system, the Satyananda Yoga system.

At Ganga Darshan you are taught not only the practices, but also how to live yoga. There is a difference between learning the practices and living the system, living the philosophy, living yoga as a lifestyle, because ultimately that is the main component that will make a difference to all of us and, through us, to the greater mass of society.

Worldwide there has been an enormous growth of interest in and acceptance of yoga. Yoga is a system that incorporates a lifestyle, a practice, an idea. For example, both karma yoga and bhakti yoga are ideas that you can incorporate into your life. For a karma yogi, selfless service does not remain only an idea; rather, you become someone who expresses and experiences selflessness through action.

A bhakti yogi can experience such intense emotion that eventually the emotion burns the body completely, like Mirabai, whose physical body disintegrated into the image of Krishna. For Kabir, the power of the emotion of bhakti was such that his physical body became transformed into flowers. These people lived that component in their lives. Today there are too many things distracting us and stopping us from becoming bhakti yogis; however, there have been many hatha yogis, raja yogis, karma yogis and jnana yogis who have lived that particular yoga.

A yogi is one who is able to live and experience yoga every day. The ashram environment teaches one to live yoga every moment. To have that deep experience of yoga, certain preparations have to be made and certain understandings need to be developed. You have to belong to the ashram, just like you have a feeling for your home, which is yours in pleasure and pain, joy and suffering. When you have this feeling of belonging, your involvement – head, heart and soul – will cultivate the potential of the environment for you, both personal and outer.

Experiencing the yamas and niyamas

At Ganga Darshan living the yogic principles is emphasized. The activities of the ashram, or gurukul, or Bihar Yoga Bharati, are established so that each step is an understanding of the yamas and niyamas. For example, in karma yoga *satya* is to be lived. *Satya* does not mean truth; it is knowing yourself, unveiling yourself, recognizing the role of the ego, recognizing the role of aversion, the role of desperation, the role of aggression. It is recognizing your own role and how you can find your balance. You have to find your own solution, as no one can do it for you; even if somebody had that ability, you would only accept the solution you had discovered yourself.

In karma yoga, when you adhere to *satya*, you see yourself in your true colours, not as a victim and someone else as the manipulator, or as the manipulator and someone else

as the victim. That is a power game, and it has its role, yet in the context of yogic life you have to understand yourself, responding to the demands of the present. When you respond to the demands of the present, that reaction will carry a colour, which needs to be identified. The colour might be compassion, or affection, or love, or hatred, or dislike: it could be anything. The purpose of karma yoga for oneself is identifying that colour. Service is something else. The purity it provides you with has to be understood. Karma yoga leads to the attainment of *shaucha*, purity, one of the niyamas. You aspire and strive for shaucha, and while pursuing that road, you develop *ahimsa*, the non-violent nature.

The yamas and niyamas complement each other in the process of karma yoga, in the path of bhakti yoga, in the systems of raja yoga, in the perfection of kriya yoga, and the process of awakening through kundalini yoga. Take mouna as an example. If you can't stop the external chattering with words, how can you stop the internal chattering with the unconscious and the subconscious? If you are happy about failing in *sanyam*, balanced restraint, outside, how can you expect to have sanyam inside? Your drive and motivation is to fail in sanyam and to inspire others to fail as well. Attainment of failure is your right, yet you are free to leave that mind outside the walls of Ganga Darshan.

By experimenting with and experiencing the yamas and niyamas and their role in one's life, in meditation, in pratyahara and dharana, in the course of time you become like someone writing with an eraser. The impressions remain inside but the darkness goes away; the individual identity remains but the tamas goes away. That is the statement of the *Yoga Sutras*. From being a *buddhu*, idiot, one becomes a Buddha, the enlightened one.

Ultimate aim of yoga

In the last forty years, the development of yoga was confined to a particular branch of learning and practice; therefore, no attempt was made to pursue the ultimate aim of yoga. The

little-known yogas were viewed as esoteric. The common yogas were those to achieve physical fitness, or to sit and meditate for extended periods of time, trying to hypnotize oneself into a positive and uplifting experience. Even today people think that the ultimate aim of yoga is God-realization, meditation and samadhi, discovering sat-chit-ananda: the truth, the inner nature, the bliss. However, more than samadhi or God-realization, the aim of yoga is to become part of human life.

Until yoga is part of your life, you cannot experience samadhi. It is like the digestive process. You eat something, digest, eliminate it, and feel hungry again. Again you eat something and the process is repeated. Eating fulfils specific needs during specific periods of time. In the same manner, all these drives to experience God or to have an understanding and experience of samadhi are not real needs.

If you want to become a musician, it is no good knowing the theory; you have to practise and make music a part of your life. If you want to become a scientist, you have to become a scientist outside as well as inside the laboratory, as many scientific breakthroughs have taken place in the relaxed environment of the home, or the meadow, or the forest. Newton was fast asleep when the apple fell on his head. Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity while flying a kite. Archimedes was in the bathtub when suddenly inspiration hit him and he ran naked through the streets crying out, "Eureka! Eureka!" In the same manner, if you want to experience any of the states of yoga, you have to live yoga. If you want to experience meditation, it is not good enough just to meditate for one, two or three hours every day; it is also important to live it, to understand what meditation is and what you are experiencing. It has to become a spontaneous part of one's natural expression.

That is the vision of Swami Sivananda. He always had a vision that a person could be divine and that life could be divine. However, the life that becomes divine is the life that

lives yoga moment to moment, a life that is initially guided by sanyam, balanced action. Sanyam is not our nature and has to become our nature. By nature, we are destructive rather than creative. We try to learn how to develop our creativity, yet we rarely have to learn how to be destructive. Goodness cannot be acquired through theory.

Most spiritual seekers in the world seek the ultimate through theory and logic and are therefore utter fools. Instead of becoming Buddhas they remain buddhus! How can one seek the ultimate truth through theory and logic? To say, on the one hand, that reality is beyond the senses and, on the other, try to grab at that reality with the senses, is self-contradictory. If it is beyond the senses, it cannot be attained. If it is beyond the mind, it cannot be attained. So what can be attained? Opening the mind to become a receptacle of that truth, that consciousness: that is your effort. You can only open the mind. You cannot acquire that peace, that expression of self, that samadhi through will alone. You cannot acquire it through logic alone, nor through sitting in meditation for six hours a day. The Satyananda system of yoga, now developed and propagated by Bihar Yoga Bharati, aims to fill this gap. The thrust of the Bihar School is understanding yoga as a way of life rather than as a practice or as an intellectual concept.

Anushasana: governing the subtle dimension

To aid in the process of attaining our aspirations, a condition has to be created that allows us to become self-observant, to improve the quality of performance, thinking, speech and behaviour. The creation of these conditions is called anushasana. The word *anushasana* is generally translated as ‘discipline’; however, the real meaning is governing the subtle dimensions, the subtle aspect, the subtle behaviour, which is the fertile ground from which all manifestations take place. Their seed is hidden in the subtle dimension.

Normally we are not responsive to systems and disciplines. We think of them as restrictions, as bondage, as

limitations, yet these are all our own projections. If we go to the crux of it, anushasana is a condition that aids in the development of something different within us. However, our own ego does not allow us to see that. Our ego only shows it as something that inhibits or curtails our freedom. The moment we identify with such an idea, we become slaves to the mental whims, the *vrittis*. *Viparyaya* or misconception manifests; *vikalpa* or doubt manifests. When we become slaves to our *vrittis*, we move away from the path of yoga.

If followed properly with the right attitude, anushasanas, systems and disciplines, can bring life to the spiritual energy dormant within. However, as our ego does not allow us to understand, there is a mental barrier, and despite appreciating the truth, we side with the untruth. That is our weakness, created by the ego. If the truth hurts you, you will never see it. That is the projection of the ego.

People respond differently to the concept of anushasana. Those who feel it is impeding their growth and limiting their creativity will always be apologetic for the system and discipline. Those who recognize it as a condition that can lead to the development of something positive within will always inspire you to follow it more and more.

If you want to live yoga, you have to sacrifice whatever is a barrier to spiritual life. If you want to live in a room that has been closed for years, you have to open the doors and windows, clean out all the grime and dust which has accumulated, light some incense and make it a pleasant room to live in. You have to allow the fresh air in. If you don't like it then change your apartment, change your city, change your association, yet be true to yourself. This message is applicable to everyone: to the sannyasins, to the new students and the old students, as only when you experience this principle of yoga will you know what yoga truly stands for. You have to make the effort to become the self-observer; to become somebody who experiences yoga. The possibilities are endless and the mind has to be open.

This is the journey of yoga that has received the blessings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, two great sages of our time. Yoga will become the world culture one day, and the acceptance of yoga throughout the world is proving it. As you begin to experiment with the wholeness of yoga and look upon it as something that can bring out the potential inside, rather than as something you do externally to feel good and relieve your stress, it will provide you with something deeper than you bargained for.

—29 July 2003

If yogic life is about love and not about perfection, how can we keep the right direction and avoid fanatically pursuing an ideal perfection and forgetting about love?

Yogic life is not about love or perfection. The concept of love in today's society makes a person weak, and that is not the purpose of love. Love is defined as affection, caring, sympathy, and so on, yet is that really love? The social concept of love is sensual, sexual and emotional. Something that pleases you through the senses is considered to be love. Something that is imbibed emotionally and is pleasing to the self is defined as love. We include so many things and believe it is all love, or express it in the garb of love, yet it actually inhibits the development of inner strength and makes people weak. Therefore, it is wrong to say that yogic life is about love.

You cannot say that love is conditional or unconditional until you have come to a point where you are able to distinguish between personal love and impersonal love. What is the role of God in relation to humanity? What is the role of a mother in relation to her children? If you say that God loves us all and that a mother loves her children equally, then what is the expression of that love in life? The love that exists between parent and child is true love. Between husband and wife or between lovers, it is conditional love. The only unconditional love that exists in our lives is between mother

and child. In that love any kind of sacrifice can be made. It is not an overprotective love. It does not suppress life; it nurtures life. The nurturing is important, as it develops inner strength.

As long as you are nice to the person you love, everything is rosy, but if one of you becomes angry for some reason, your entire concept of love is shattered. Therefore, although everybody wants to be loved, instead they fall in love. When you are in love with somebody, you say you 'fell in love'; however, you should rise in love. When love becomes conditional, you fall, and when love becomes unconditional, you rise. Unconditional love exists between God and humanity, and therefore we are always looking up to God as a source of inspiration and strength, care and affection. We are trying to rise up to that level through our sincerity, faith, conviction, belief. We are ready to go through all the trials and tribulations of life in order to experience that unconditional love.

A mother loves her child very much. The child is part of her body, part of her spirit. Propelled by that love, the mother ensures that the child always has the right opportunities to grow. If the child is sick, in pain, if the child has gangrene, for example, the mother will carry the child to the doctor and say, "Amputate the leg so the child can survive." The child will not say to the mother, "You are amputating my leg because you don't love me any more." However, this happens with adults. The moment something happens, the love is shattered. Therefore, yoga cannot be about love; at least not in the way that we think of love. For many people love is an opportunity to hug everybody. They seek emotional fulfilment in the guise of love. However, that cannot be love because love has to make a person strong, not weak.

What is perfection? If you define perfection, then it is not perfection any more, as perfection cannot be defined. Who is perfect in the world? Can a master be perfect? Can a teacher be perfect? Can an individual be perfect? As long as we are

in this body, as long as we are in this world, we are slaves to the conditioning of the body, mind, emotions and spirit. These conditionings will not allow us to become perfect. Therefore, yoga is not about perfection either.

Yoga is about becoming aware. Yoga is about managing the negative aspects of our character and developing the positive qualities that uplift our nature, and in doing so we are uplifting others as well. When we are expressing these qualities then other people are uplifted, and that is yoga! If you have the quality of loving, then love will manifest, but that love will be unconditional. If you do not have that quality, no matter how hard you try, nothing will happen. You can hug a million people, you can say nice things, yet you will never know what love is.

There is a story about a person who practised austerities for many years in order to manifest God in his life. Moved by these austerities, God appeared and said, "Ask me for any boon you want." The person said, "I have nothing to ask. My wish was just to see you, not to ask for a boon." God repeated his request, but each time the person refused to ask for a boon, so as the person started to walk away, God granted the boon of healing to his shadow. Unaware that his shadow had received this boon, the person continued walking, totally ignorant of the miracles that were happening behind him. His shadow fell on a dead tree, and the tree became green, laden with leaves, flowers and fruits. The shadow fell on a sick person, who became healthy and started to jump up and down with joy. The shadow fell on a blind person, who suddenly could see. The shadow fell on a lame person, who suddenly could walk. The shadow fell on a dead person, who came alive. In this way, one miracle after another happened, and the person did not even know about it. Wherever he went, the boon of healing worked behind his back through his shadow, without his knowledge.

This story conveys a simple message. In expressing your qualities, be like this person. Everything happens without expectation, without desire, as long as the heart is clear,

open and simple. That is the outcome of yogic life. Yogic life is not perfection. It is not love. It is knowing, realizing and expressing your best.

—1 September 2003

What is the role of love in bhakti?

Love is the foundation of bhakti yoga. Without love we cannot place trust or faith or belief in anyone. If we believe in someone, it is because we love them. Love is the primary ingredient. However, the quality of the love we experience when we are involved in the objective world is conditioned and self-oriented, not unconditional and pure. If our aspirations are fulfilled by loving somebody, only then will we love that person. Otherwise, he or she has no meaning in our life. That is the natural human condition.

Love, trust, faith and belief are only given when we are totally involved with all our faculties. When we are not involved, they do not exist. In order to develop bhakti, unconditional love has to be activated and expanded. This is achieved by recognizing the suffering of others as our own, being a good Samaritan, understanding the difficulties of others and helping them to find happiness and contentment. That is the expansion of love.

Eventually, this pure love is also transformed. Love and compassion are synonymous terms. Pure love is compassion; impure love is self-oriented desire. The path of bhakti is the movement from self-oriented desire to the unconditional expression of compassion. Worship, chanting, selfless service and prayers are a means to awaken this dormant love, to overcome and transform our present conditioning and develop a broader vision of God's existence in our life and in the world. Therefore, bhakti is developing unconditional love, which in turn is transformed into compassion and gives rise to the experience of faith and belief. When love, compassion, faith and belief are attained, that is the culmination of bhakti.

—11 October 2003

How can we become desireless?

It is not possible to become desireless. Just as a car without an engine is useless, in the same way life without desire has no meaning.

We can classify desires as tamasic, rajasic and sattwic. Our effort is to move into a sattwic reality of living; that is the aim of the spiritual tradition and yoga. Our desires, passions and aspirations are rajasic by nature, meaning self-oriented. They become tamasic when we begin to try and better ourselves at the expense of other people. A sattwic desire seeks to uplift others rather than oneself. In the sattwic nature, the desire is to be useful to others; however, there are very few people with sattwic desires.

The tamasic nature desires to make others submissive. The rajasic nature attempts to control the situation and environment, and be the master. In sattwa, the little self is negated; the nature is caring, not uncaring, and one can witness and analyze what is really necessary and what is not. Desire continues; however, sattwic desires have to be cultivated so that useless things are negated and we adopt those things that are useful for personal upliftment and enable us to help others.

—11 October 2003

Can you tell us about Rama?

Rama personified the highest ideals that an individual can attain. The story of Rama is contained in the *Ramayana*, written by Valmiki, and the *Ramacharitamanas*, by Tulsidas. Rama was an historical figure, a reality that later became a myth.

The story of Rama is a very simple one. He was born to a king who was old and had three wives. The king's name was Dasharatha. *Das* means 'ten', *rath* means 'chariot'; therefore, *Dasharatha* means the chariot pulled by ten horses. Our bodies are that chariot, and the ten horses are the ten senses.

Within the body there are certain inherent desires. The spiritual traditions have classified human desires into three

groups: *lokeshana*, the need for recognition; *vitteshana*, the need for security: social, financial, and so on; and *putreshana*, the desire for progeny. Recognition, security and progeny are the three classifications of desires. Some people have one, some have two, some have all three; however, there is always something.

In the body of King Dasharatha, the chariot pulled by ten horses, the desire for offspring was predominant, so Dasharatha went to a yogi, asking for the fulfilment of his desire, and the yogi performed a yajna, which created the right ambience. As the outcome of the yajna, Rama was born to Dasharatha's first wife, Kaushalya, who represents the sattvic nature. Bharata was born to the second wife, Kaikeyi, who represents the tamasic nature, and Lakshmana and Shatrughna, the twins, were born to the third wife, Sumitra, who represents the rajasic nature.

The body of the ten senses also has three wives: sattwa, rajas and tamas. When we are under the sway of a particular wife or husband, our responses become like that quality, be it sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. Rama was born from sattwa, Bharata from tamas, and Lakshmana and Shatrughna from rajas. This is how the birth of Rama took place. The pure consciousness will only come down in sattwa.

In the course of time, Rama married Sita. Rama represents the pure Self and Sita represents the individual self. The marriage represents the union of the individual with the cosmic, with pure consciousness.

King Dasharatha came under the sway of Kaikeyi, the tamasic wife, who wanted to send Rama into exile. Only tamas would want to send the pure consciousness away, because in the presence of pure consciousness tamas cannot exist. Therefore, Rama was sent into exile. The pure consciousness is sent away from the body under the sway of tamas. When God leaves the body, who also leaves along with God? When the loved one leaves the room, the lover will also leave the room, so both Rama and Sita left. While the exile only applied to Rama, Sita decided she

would not stay behind, for she couldn't live without Rama. Therefore, for a good thirteen years, Rama and Sita had a great time in the forest. The Beloved and the lover, the pure Self and the individual self, were together consorting happily with each other. Now the king had to die, because the individual spirit had left, and *tamas* had overpowered the king. With the departure of that inherent God, the pure consciousness, and the individual consciousness, the body of the ten senses dies.

Meanwhile, Rama and Sita were enjoying each other's company in the forest, admiring each other and being happy with each other. Now, if these two are together, if the individual self, the confined, finite self is with the Cosmic Self, how can there be creation? The finite self has to be brought back down to our level, into the body of the ten senses again. In order to achieve this, the ten-headed monster named Dashanana appeared on the scene. *Dashanana* means ten heads. The head represents the ego of the senses. The ten heads are the five *karmendriyas*, the organs of action, and the five *jnanendriyas*, the organs of cognition. Each one has its own ego, so it is identified as the ten heads. It is these *indriyas* or senses which now have to capture that individual self away from God.

What was the object of attraction sent to lure Sita away? A golden deer. The pure consciousness knows very well that, as God, it has created everything in the world, except a golden deer. Rama knew that it was an illusion, that it was foul play, yet Rama, the pure consciousness, also has to play a role, which is known as *lila*. He indulges in this *lila* in order to manage the ego of the senses and also to uplift the positive qualities and create a balance. Therefore, he agrees to get the golden deer for Sita, the individual consciousness.

As Rama went after the golden deer, the ten-headed monster, Ravana, came and captured Sita and took her to his city of Lanka. Lanka was a city of gold, which again represents ego. Sita was placed in a garden known as *Ashoka Vatika*, the place where sadness can never enter. Where is

the place of sadness in our body? The heart. The heart is considered to be the seat of the individual soul.

In order to discover Sita again, Rama engaged two very important personalities. One was Hanuman, who represents devotion. In order to bring the individual consciousness back to the pure Self, devotion is required. Bhakti is the last transformation in human life in order to experience the divine: bhakti in its purest form. This is why Hanuman was the one who discovered Sita.

In order to rescue Sita, Rama went to Lanka, which indicates that the pure consciousness has come down to the level of the human experience. It is said that if God is at all hungry, he is only yearning and experiencing hunger for your devotion. God is attained through devotion, through love, through the qualities of the heart. This is the reason the qualities of the heart have always been emphasized: be kind, be compassionate, be loving, be gentle.

A fight then took place between the ten-headed monster Ravana, the ego of the senses, and Rama, the pure consciousness. While Rama chopped off the heads and the arms of this monster many times, they all grew back. Then another personality, Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, entered the scene. While Ravana represents the rashness of the ego, Vibhishana represents *viveka*, the discriminative ability of the intellect. It is this *viveka* or right wisdom that tells Rama, the pure consciousness, that if he wants to kill that monster, it is no good just playing with the ten heads and arms, as they will grow again. Instead, he has to go to the source of their life.

What is the source of life? Manipura chakra. A baby is connected to the mother's body by the umbilical cord. Manipura chakra is the seat of *prana shakti*, the life-force. It is also a very important centre in kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. Prana is the source of all manifest creation. Therefore, Vibhishana tells Rama to dry up the source so that nothing will grow again. In the war, Rama shot an arrow into the navel of the monster Ravana and then shot ten arrows into

Ravana's ten heads. The life-force that is responsible for giving birth to each ego was destroyed, and the existing ego was destroyed. In this way, Rama was able to reclaim Sita.

According to the myth, the birth of Rama, the cosmic consciousness, takes place on *Ramanavami*, the ninth day of Chaitra Navaratri, which falls in March or April. On Vijaya Dashami, the last day of Ashwin Navaratri, in September–October, Rama is victorious over Ravana, and he is able to reclaim and become one with the individual self. These two events are an indication of what we can aspire for.

Navaratri is therefore connected with Rama as well as with Devi, the Cosmic Mother. It is an attempt to reconnect with the underlying reality within, to tune the individual consciousness with the cosmic consciousness, and to redirect life towards the goal of positive evolution.

—13 October 2003

Is it true that jnana yogis are always asking themselves, 'Who am I?'

This is a false notion. *Jnana* means to know, and a yogi is one who is living what he knows. Therefore, a jnana yogi is one who is established in wisdom, and such a person is not going to ask silly questions. When you travel by train from one place to another, it is not logical to keep asking yourself, 'Where am I?' because you are moving and you know that you will reach your destination. In the same way, the jnana yogi, who is established in wisdom, began his journey with the focus of discovering 'Who am I?' The question arises only once in a lifetime, not every day. If it arises every day, it means that the person is not a jnana yogi, but is stuck in one place and cannot move forward. As the process of discovery begins, the enquiry is left behind and each day is a new discovery. This discovery continues until the jnana yogi becomes established in wisdom.

To become established in something and to realize its importance, it is necessary to go through a crisis. If

everybody in the world were healthy, medical science would not exist. Disease, death and suffering have led to research and the advancement of medical science. If we change an idea, it is because the previous idea was shattered. If there is a change in thinking, it is because the previous thought no longer has any purpose. Crisis acts as a catalyst for change.

The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is about *vishada yoga*, the yoga of grief. It is a beautiful concept. If you are grieving and you are able to provide a direction for yourself, that becomes yoga. If you fail to provide yourself with a direction and go further into the grief then it becomes imbalance. It is like achieving balance in stress. Negative stress is distress; positive stress is eustress and the balance point is zero stress. If the string of a bow is too loose, there is no stress, no force, and the bow becomes useless. If the string is too tight, it may break because distress is created. There has to be the right tension. Similarly, grief in itself is not bad or negative; it is the management of grief that is important.

If we are able to provide a direction to our thoughts and energies, grief becomes a factor in creating positive change and causing greater achievements in life. The same grief, when mismanaged, becomes a disease or imbalance which then governs the behaviour of the body, the brain and the mind, so there is sweating, dry mouth, frequent urination, sleeplessness, nervous breakdown.

Everyone should have the experience of positive grief; not grief in the way we understand it, but in its positive sense, where it gives the desire for a change, knowing the futility of the condition in which we have been living. Once that stage comes, the process of purification begins. It happened to Sri Rama, to Arjuna, to Buddha, to Christ, to Prophet Mohammed; it has happened to so many people who have become luminaries in the world.

Knowing fully well that we cannot handle it, we do not subject ourselves to grief. Our intense effort, *tapasya*, is not grief; it is pleasure. We meditate because there is pleasure in meditation. We like to practise mantra because

there is pleasure in mantra. If we did not derive pleasure in meditation, we would not even practise it. If we do not derive pleasure from something, we are not attracted to it. However, here we are not talking of those things that give us pleasure and therefore become our sadhana, but of those things that give us the opportunity to change an existing pattern that was the cause of our previous conditioning. Grief is the catalyst for that inner transformation. As seekers, as aspirants, we have to face this grief within ourselves and provide ourselves with a direction.

There is a beautiful concept in tantra. The tradition says there are eleven Rudras who are manifestations of Shiva. The meaning of *Rudra* is 'one who cries'. How can a person who cries all the time be identified as a manifestation of Shiva? Shiva is consciousness, and there are various layers and stages of progression in that consciousness, defining different levels of existence and experience. In the same manner, the eleven Rudras represent eleven stages of consciousness and each one has a specific pattern, a specific design, a specific yantra and a specific mandala. As we move from one to the other, there is a letting go of the things that previously held us back. When those things are left behind, then grief comes.

Grief can be experienced in different ways. You can be a *drashta*, a witness, to it and this is taught in yoga. You can use a meditative process like antar mouna to discover the real cause; or you can practise swadhyaya and analyze a state in which you have felt helpless and hopeless, and see what options there are for you to outgrow and move out of that situation. We are always given choices in the world. The right choice makes us succeed in life. The wisdom has to prevail where we are able to make the right choice, not follow the wrong one. In order to make the right choice, we should be able to also look at the whole picture.

If there is a photograph of yourself lying on the floor and an ant wanders across the surface, it will only see blobs of colour, not your face. If you want the ant to see your face, you have to pick it up, so it can see the whole image. In the

same manner, when we are involved in a situation, we do not see the full picture; we only see blobs. We are frightened by these meaningless blobs and we don't know how to handle ourselves in that situation. That is known as the pull of pleasure and pain, like and dislike. We get so involved that we feel we are a part of it; however, being able to look at oneself by taking a step back is the concept of *drashta*. To be able to manage situations and go through changes, crises and grief in an optimistic and positive frame of mind is *viveka*. *Viveka* is handling the mind with wisdom, being unaffected by different influences.

If somebody says you are ugly, or beautiful, these words make a difference in your mind and you respond. This is only a small example of the effect that words can have. Many other things affect you in the same way. To be able to maintain balance is *sanyam*. When we can maintain a balanced witnessing attitude, it is known as *vairagya*, dispassion. We can be surrounded by money, yet it has no attraction, surrounded by people, yet remain in total isolation, be in the world, yet not belong to it. The classic example is the lotus flower. It grows in water; it is nourished by water; it is surrounded by water; it cannot exist without water; yet the leaves and the flower remain totally unaffected by water and are absolutely dry. That is how a yogi has to be. A yogi is like a magician who is able to manage the psychic, invisible and spiritual, the physical, material and sensorial, and find the balance there.

—15 October 2003

Please explain Sri Swamiji's words, "When the mother retreats, the guru comes."

During the 2003 Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Sri Swamiji said that when the Cosmic Mother comes, the role of the guru is over. When the Mother departs, the role of the guru begins once again. It is quite logical. The purpose of a guru is to bring the aspirant in front of divinity, or the transcendental nature, or God, or the Higher Self.

The guru should be seen not as a person with a physical body, but as representing the quality and energy that inspires and motivates each of us to attain a glimpse of the transcendental nature that is contained within us and of which we are a part. The confusion comes when we identify with the guru at the physical level. Then we ask why the master with whom we have identified is physically absent during an event. However, that is our shortcoming, for the guru is not the physical body.

When Sri Swamiji himself went to his guru, Swami Sivananda's ashram in Rishikesh, he was an ordinary person. However, with the grace of guru and also with conviction, dedication and surrender on his part, he became luminous. The guru tattwa manifested in him. Do you connect with him because of the body, or do you connect with him because of that guru tattwa shakti in him? If you connect with him because of the body, you have missed all the secrets of spiritual life. If you connect with him because of the essence that he represents then it makes no difference whether he is there physically or not. As a spiritual aspirant, as a person sincere enough to follow the path of yoga, it is necessary to also identify with the quality or the nature of the guru, which is inspiring, motivating and guiding all of us.

The guru tattwa, the guru shakti, is responsible for uplifting the human mind from the basic material plane to the higher spiritual and transcendental planes. That is the role of the guru. The role of the guru is not to sit in front of you physically and bless you and grace you. That is the job of pontiffs, not of gurus. Gurus are sparks. Swami Sivananda created a spark in Sri Swamiji; the material was right, it caught fire. The guru creates sparks within all of us, yet the material is not right and we do not catch fire. Sometimes our material is all wet due to our frustrations, tensions and anxieties, so there is a lot of smoke but no fire. Sometimes we are made out of material that cannot catch fire, like a rock; sometimes we are made of material that can catch fire, and it burns.

There is a saying that if God and guru are both standing before you, to whom should you pay your respects first? The answer is to pay your respects to the guru first because it is through him that you have attained God. God is secondary, not primary. We have to understand what Sri Swamiji is doing in this spirit. He is uplifting the level of our consciousness, our awareness, and making us live yoga, as opposed to practising yoga.

There are two traditions: one is practising yoga, the other is living yoga. Both traditions are very strong. Sage Patanjali is recognized as the codifier of yoga. He describes the process of yoga as being to prepare oneself to receive that higher awareness. However, after you have prepared yourself to receive that higher energy, that higher grace, then comes the yoga of Swami Sivananda, which is to experience and manifest that quality, that grace, that ability, that creativity, that clarity, which you have developed with the practices of yoga. Sage Patanjali talks of the eightfold path of yoga as practice. After that, Swami Sivananda also talks of an eightfold path of yoga as living the experience of yoga.

When we are living the experience of yoga, our consciousness is uplifted. Take the example of a radio. When you turn it on, there is a lot of static; however, as you move the dial towards the station, the static and garbled noises become less and less. Sometimes when you are near the station, there is a high-pitched sound, as if all the sounds have fused and become one high frequency sound. The frequency goes higher and higher until it becomes inaudible and then you come to the station and hear the music. This is the process of yoga.

When you turn on the radio and there is static and garbled noises, that is ordinary life. The *chitta vrittis*, modifications of the mind, are active. There is no tuning, no focusing, no clarity: this is the state we are in at present. Then you begin to move the dial of the radio in order to tune it. The purpose of tuning is to lower the other frequencies so that the words, the sound or the music can

come through clearly. That is elimination or removal, and focusing. Both are happening at the same time. Through the practices of yoga, you move through the states of pratyahara and dharana, and that gradually reduces the garble and the static. Next, all the sounds fuse into one and you get a high frequency whistling note. That is like meditation, *dhyana*, where everything has fused and merged into one high frequency note. As that frequency goes higher and higher and becomes inaudible, the state of dhyana is converted into samadhi. Up to this point it is human effort; then you pass that point and you come to the station and begin to hear music. That is living the experience, because now there is no focusing, no concentration, no meditation, yet you are listening to the whole spectrum of sounds: the music, the words, in harmony. That is living yoga.

This is the movement of yoga. At each stage, as we evolve, as we progress more and more, our mind, our feelings, our emotions, our sentiments become more refined; they become much sharper and more creative. With this refinement, a new perception dawns. A new understanding, a new vision, a new state of mind is experienced. That state of mind is known as *saumyata*, the serene mind. There is no exact word for saumyata in English. The closest we can come is serenity or balanced wisdom, sthitaprajna, that Krishna talks about in the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is in this state of balanced wisdom, or saumyata, or stithaprajna, that one connects with the higher realities.

Just as in samadhi you connect with the higher realities, similarly, with the awakening, transformation and purification of the mind, there is an awareness and an experience of that Higher Self. That experience of the Higher Self has to be maintained. That experience of the Higher Self covers all the aspects of life: karmas, actions, behaviours and attitudes. It creates an energy field around a person and a place, and once you enter that energy field you are touched by it, you feel different; you feel happy, at peace, tranquil. What you experience intellectually through your buddhi in front of

the master as peace, serenity, control, balance and harmony is only an external understanding of a subtle process that is affecting your consciousness and psyche at deeper levels. That subtle process has to be developed in order to become the recipient of that cosmic grace, in order to experience that transcendental nature within.

The role of the guru is to bring you to that level. Once there is that connection with the Higher Self, the function, the role of the guru is over. Then you have to become that light. You have to experience that higher nature. Later, when you are again brought back to this material plane because of the mind and the self-limitations, the guru returns and says, “Okay, now you have to do this, this and this in order to overcome your limitations and fly.” Therefore, what Sri Swamiji said during the yajna was the truth. Those who have ears hear, those who have eyes see.

—3 December 2003

Swamiji, you are my guru. While this is only the second time I have seen you, there is a deep attraction and I feel I know you from the past. How does this happen?

Life is an interplay of emotions and affections, and we relate to each other with the help of our emotions and affections. Some people express that quality more than others and can link up with somebody at the emotional level and find the support that nourishes and sustains them emotionally.

It is your sentiment, your feelings and your emotions that are creating that link between you and me. The same can happen in reverse as well. You may see me for the first time and totally dislike me. There will be a different reaction. Then the question would be, “Why do I hate you at the first sight? Were we enemies in a past life?” These questions have no relevance at all, as we are all relating to each other through our emotions and affections. If you remove the emotion and affection, there is no connection between you and me, or anybody else for that matter.

If you have a positive emotion, then cultivate it. There is a positive application and a negative, detrimental application of the feelings, emotions and strengths that we all have. We have to cultivate the positive and the uplifting. Instead of brooding over what is restrictive, negative and bad, cultivate what is positive and good, and try not to think about it too much. Why think about doing good, feeling good and experiencing good? Goodness has to be understood in a practical way. It is human nature to be bad, not good. Any actor will tell you that it is very easy to play a villain, but playing a good role does not come spontaneously and requires preparation.

Becoming good and being good can create a lot of practical difficulties and so you have to be very careful and learn how to manage goodness. Goodness can only be managed if the structure of the mind has been developed to an extent where it is aligned with positive and creative qualities. This happens with the practice of the yamas and niyamas. By practising the yamas and niyamas, we learn how to understand goodness and apply and experience that goodness in our life.

Applying and experiencing goodness in our life is known as *tapasya*. Tapasya is not austerity or self-punishment. Tapasya is transformation of the inner self to experience and live that good quality. As long as we are able to creatively express that goodness within, there is a connection to everyone around us that is supportive and uplifting. If that connection is not there, nothing will hold our attention. Our motivation and inspiration will be dissipated and we will lose interest. Therefore, the question is not about you or me. It is about how to develop and maintain that good feeling and energy which can strengthen the bond between guru and disciple, and which can also act as the launching pad for discovering new and higher dimensions in our lives. That is known as *sambandha*, harmonious connection, harmonious interaction.

—3 December 2003

Would you talk about dharma? Psychologists claim that the function of feelings is to help us make decisions. Should we be guided by our feelings or should we let our intellect guide our decisions according to the laws of dharma?

According to the laws of dharma, there is no scope for either feeling or rationality. *Dharma* is purely an understanding of the natural interaction and the natural law that governs the individual, society, the world and the cosmos. Dharma is knowing the potential that exists in each and every dimension of this creation, and not only is it cognition of that potential, it is also living according to the appropriate conditions. In one word, dharma is appropriateness.

Some people say dharma is duty. Some say dharma is religion. Some say dharma is the natural law. However, dharma, in spirit, represents three main functions: appropriate action, appropriate behaviour and appropriate thinking. As long as your thoughts, behaviour and actions are appropriate to the situations and circumstances, you are on the right track.

Dharma entails understanding. Dharma is not a reactive response to circumstance, but the appropriate response, which develops after you have understood and are in control of that particular situation, whether it be personal, social or global. If there is proper understanding of the situation then dharma is natural and spontaneous. If there is no understanding of the situation, then there is a headache trying to figure out what one's dharma is. Asking, "Should I do this? Should I not do that?" is confusion; natural and spontaneous expression is dharma.

If your child falls down and gets hurt, what would your response be? Would you think, "Shall I pick up my child or not?" or would you act spontaneously to help the child? If you act spontaneously, believing in something, that will be dharma; however, if you act according to some intellectual process, you will never find the answer to what dharma is and further confusion will be created. Dharma cannot be rationalized. In order to live dharma you need to act as

you would to protect your child, with that awareness and clarity. If the mind is clear, there is dharma. If there is no understanding, there is no dharma.

—3 December 2003

How can we understand the consciousness of children?

Rather than looking at consciousness as belonging to a child or an adult, let us look at the idea of consciousness as yoga believes it to be. Consciousness is energy and at the same time it is a state of being. There are two states: one state is becoming, when we use the potential, the activity and the power to change what we are at present to something else. The other state is being. We become; we are. In consciousness both these possibilities exist, of becoming and of being, and these possibilities actualize themselves when in the right environment.

When we are born, our consciousness is pure, without any influences or impressions of the present-day environment. That pure consciousness remains with us in our young days until the age of eight. This state of consciousness is like a sponge; it is simply absorbing everything. It is absorbing the information received through the senses, through the interactions, through the intellectual and emotional inputs. In this manner, the consciousness conditions itself to survive and to exist in this material plane.

Until the age of eight, the information received by the consciousness is purely intuitive. Non-linear information, non-sequential information, is received. This is the idea of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. When we begin our school education, a change happens in the pattern of consciousness and we begin a sequential learning process, a linear learning process. The moment the sequential and linear learning process begins, our personality changes. We become fixed in certain ideas; that A comes before B, C follows B, and in this way an understanding is developed. That understanding is a very set understanding, and this

is where the personality undergoes a major transformation in life.

Swami Sivananda used to say that the nature, the personality, the mindset of a child is like a lump of clay; you can give it any shape you want. The family contributes to giving shape to that consciousness. The culture in which we live, the social environment, the religious environment, the educational environment, all contribute to the formation of human consciousness.

The Indian tradition and the yogic traditions say that development of consciousness in all levels: intuitive, spiritual, cultural, social, personal, psychic, happens before the age of eight, before the child actually joins the first class of primary school. The day we join the first class of primary school, this development stops and linear development begins.

The education received by the consciousness until the age of eight is given the name 'samskara'. *Samskaras* are impressions that superimpose themselves on consciousness. The information we receive after the age of eight at school is known as *shiksha*. *Samskaras* are received until the age of eight and *shiksha*, after the age of eight. The yogic traditions, the Indian traditions, have greatly emphasized the need for *samskara*, for in your future life, when you grow up, when you are thirty or forty or sixty, you become that person. You express those qualities and habits that you imbibed before the age of eight. What you are today is what you were made before the age of eight. What you were made after the age of eight is seen in the degrees and diplomas you have in your homes, in your bags and in your workplaces. That is your qualification to survive in the world, which you received after the age of eight. However, the *swabhava*, the nature, the mind and the responses of the mind, the ability to manage situations in life and to deal with people, all these abilities you gained in your childhood, in that subtle education which was imbibed by the consciousness, and it is this consciousness which has to be nurtured.

There have been many people in the world who, with the right training, have developed in a different way from other people. We have experimented with such people. A family from Germany came to the ashram with their two-year-old daughter. They wanted to bring her up from the yogic perspective, so we suggested some yoga nidra practices and I gave the daughter a name. She was totally innocent. After all, what can a child of two years say? However, the most surprising thing was that a week after she was given the name, when I asked her, "What is your name?" she replied in German, "Ich bin Om Murti" – I am Om Murti. At the time I was struck by how a two-year-old child could recognize a name that was not in her language and identify with that name, when she could hardly even recognize her birth name.

Secondly, after she started her yoga nidra practices, her mind became so receptive and sharp that when she started preschool, after the first day she said, "Now I know everything they are going to teach me in kindergarten," and she did not go back to kindergarten. She was given tests and she passed with flying colours in all of them. After spending a few years at home enjoying herself, practising her yoga nidras and sankalpa, when the time came for her to go to primary school, she went through the classes one after another. The teachers did not know in which class to place her, as after a couple of months she would go to the next class. Today, if she is asked how many years of school she has done in her life, she will say, "About five," and she has completed all her education.

When we see these kinds of events we begin to believe that there is a different mind beyond the rational, intellectual mind, which we call the psychic mind, the intuitive mind, or the higher mind. When that higher mind kicks in, the mental faculties open up and manifest. It is this nature that has to be cultivated in a child.

It has been the experience of people who have been working with children for many years that the receptivity of children is much greater than that of grownups. They understand things in a different way and in a better way,

as their mind is not cluttered with impressions, ideas and concepts. Their mind is free. While saying a little, they understand a lot. There is the limitation that they are not able to express themselves, not able to convey what they desire or feel or need or want; however, their mental frequencies are much higher than the predefined frequencies of grownups. Grownups function in predefined frequencies according to their education, whereas children are intuitive. The main thrust of yoga education for children is to provide them with the appropriate samskaras that can be useful for them in their lives.

The normal consciousness is classified in four compartments: *jagrat*, waking; *swapna*, dreaming; *nidra*, sleeping; and *turiya*, spiritually awakened. However, the consciousness of children functions at a different level, at the intuitive level, until the age of eight. Therefore, for children, the classification is different. It is *turiya-jagrat*, intuitive and awake; *turiya-swapna*, intuitive and dreaming; *turiya-nidra*, intuitive and sleeping; and *turiya-turiya*, intuitive and creative. This is the division of consciousness in a child. As we are educated in the linear, sequential system, the *turiya* component leaves and we simply remain in *jagrat*, *swapna* and *nidra*. However, in children it is *turiya-jagrat*, *turiya-swapna*, *turiya-nidra* and *turiya-turiya*. That is the major difference between a child's expression of the conscious faculties and a grownup's expression of the conscious faculties.

In the course of time, psychologists and psychoanalysts will come to this understanding that the consciousness of children has a different set, which is the flowering of *turiya*, the highest intuitive spiritual awareness. We have lost that intuitive ability with the sequential and linear understanding of education that we have received. Therefore, we need to move from *jagrat*, from the so-called present waking state, to *turiya*. We have to learn how to become like a child again. Christ also said that to enter the kingdom of heaven you have to be like a child.

—4 December 2003

What is the role of yoga in improving the quality of life?

There can never be a conclusive answer to such a question. We all have to find our own answer, in our own space, where we are comfortable with the answer and can apply it in our lives.

First of all, how do we perceive life? From the yogic point of view, life and creation are an interplay of the karmas. Each and every being that comes within the fold of this creation in any form, whether insect, reptile, bird or human being, is subject to the law of karma. Karma is the deciding factor of life. In the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says that karma is the mainstay of creation. From the time we are conceived, karma begins. The growth of the foetus in the womb is a karmic process. Birth is a karmic process. Actualization of the intellectual and creative abilities in this life is a manifestation of karma. Karma can be from the past, karma can become the future, and it is always here in the present. Our role in this field of karma is self-centred and self-oriented; we are aware only of ourselves.

The term 'karma' evokes the idea of cause and effect. Any condition in life, whether of pleasure or pain, will evoke a personal response. What kind of response that is will depend on the intensity of the karma, which in turn will depend on what kind of attribute or *guna* it triggers within you. A person you consider to be your enemy or adversary can remain like that for almost your whole life, until the moment you come out of the space where you look upon that person as an enemy.

The pains and pleasures in life are nothing but our responses to conditions that already exist around us. Even the need or the desire to search for happiness is a response to conditioning. Sometimes these conditionings can be seen, analyzed and understood; sometimes they act as under-currents, which are unconscious, invisible and subtle.

What we can perceive and understand, we can deal with easily. Those conditions are within the ambit of our intellectual grasp and we can try to figure out ways to

overcome them. However, there are certain conditions that are unseen, yet dominate the whole behaviour and expression of our personality, and we are unable to manage or control them. When we encounter these kinds of situations, we say, “Oh, it must be my karma that I have to go through this.” When something is not understood, as it comes from an unseen, unknown and therefore uncontrollable influence, we call it karma. This means that, whether visible or invisible, there is always some influence governing us: our nature and personality, our thoughts, expressions, attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, we are not just talking here about how we derive happiness from what we do, as that is very limited when compared with the whole dimension of karmic existence.

If you win a lottery you become elated, and you become sad if you lose something. The depression or anxiety of losing something or somebody, like a job or a friend, will affect you only for a limited time, not for your whole life. These joys and anxieties represent momentary awareness of your participation and involvement in the outer conditions, which continue to influence you even when you are not aware of them.

If I practise meditation, I may be happy for a little while as long as I am able to forget my difficulties; however, that does not indicate that I have evolved in my meditation. We should look at this question, not just from our own perspective, but also from a wider understanding of how we as human beings, as God’s creatures in His creation function, and by what principles we are guided.

Sage Patanjali speaks of the eightfold path of yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. When Sage Patanjali codified yoga, the needs of that environment were different from the needs of our environment today. In those days, people did not have access to TVs, cars, mobile phones or computers. They lived a life that was simple, in society’s terms primitive, but from the yogic perspective sattwic.

In that more natural state, wherein the personality was sattvic and untainted by the need for luxury and comfort, the approach to psychology and yoga was not through the body, but through fine-tuning the mental expressions and behaviour. Sage Patanjali placed the yamas and niyamas as the first two components of yoga, as this is when you begin to fine-tune your mental expressions. After that you moved into the practice of asana, which was the third step.

The opening statement of the *Yoga Sutras* is *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*, which deals with fine-tuning the mental expressions. However, in today's environment, where we have adopted a materialistic mind and have identified principally with the needs of the body, asana and pranayama have become more important for us. Therefore, we practise asana and pranayama first, and then pratyahara and dharana are important in order to manage the frustrations of the mind. Once there is some semblance of control over the mind, we can begin thinking about how to bring about qualitative changes in our life through the yamas and niyamas.

The adoption of yamas and niyamas becomes a part of the meditative transformation that we experience through yoga. Consider the five niyamas. Purity, *shaucha*, contentment, *santosha*, and self-analysis, *swadhyaya*, are experienced in meditation. Meditation becomes a process of purifying oneself of all the rubbish accumulated over time, which is *tapasya*, and for learning how to let go and surrender, *Ishwara pranidhana*.

Meditation becomes a tool for living the five yamas also. It is a tool for living truthfulness, *satya*, and with this purifying of our nature, the intensity of violence recedes from our personality and we reflect that by following *ahimsa*, non-violence. *Asteya*, non-stealing, *aparigraha*, simple living and non-possessiveness, and *brahmacharya*, always keeping our highest aim in mind, then become natural and spontaneous for us.

The actualization of the yamas and niyamas is what we are aspiring for in the practice of karma yoga, bhakti yoga

and jnana yoga. Satya, truth, cannot be part of us until we are established in jnana yoga. Jnana yoga means applying wisdom so there is no falsity; there is only truth. Similarly, ahimsa cannot be a part of us until we are established in karma yoga. Therefore, the yamas and niyamas are complementary practices to the other yogas, and when we begin to live them, we move into a meditative awareness that is continuous and constant, not just fleeting. It is that same sense of continuity and order that we now need to apply in our lives.

After practising asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, you will feel free in the body, more relaxed, with increased vitality and concentration. Instead of just trying to meditate, apply your learning and go back to Sage Patanjali's first step, which is to adopt the yamas and niyamas. It is at this point that you will stop being a practitioner of yoga and become a yogi. Anybody who practises a little medicine may be called a doctor, yet to actually qualify as a doctor you need to have specific training. Similarly, in order to become a yogi, you need this specific training in the grind mill of yama and niyama to train for dhyana and samadhi. This is the approach that we need to adopt in order to practise yoga in our lives today.

The second point in the management of the karma which conditions your life is sanyam. Sanyam can be used as a measure to see how much you have progressed. Sanyam means restraint, controlled guidance, or to take command. Wild horses will run all over the place, yet when you train them, you can ride them and they will do your bidding.

The first component is control over speech, which in Sanskrit is *vani sanyam*. This is not an easy thing to achieve, yet controlling the speech evokes a very high intensity of energy. From *vani sanyam* comes *vak siddhi*, the power of actualizing the speech. The speech of a person who has that kind of control conveys power; it generates shakti so that whatever they speak comes true. Such people will always think in the most positive, auspicious and appropriate

manner, and therefore they will always speak the truth, as speech is the tool of expressing the state of mind.

The mind is a peculiar thing; it is a bundle of stored energy, and thoughts radiate out like electromagnetic waves. All thoughts are in the environment. We cannot see them, just as we cannot see radio waves or other waves; however, with the proper instrument we can capture them. With a radio we can capture the radio waves. In the same manner, if we had something like a 'thoughtometer', we could capture our thoughts, and listen to them like a radio.

I have known Swami Satyananda since I was born. Many other people who have also known him for a long time will bear witness to the fact that never have we heard a negative statement from him. He never thinks negatively; he is always smiling away, thinking all the good things. Never once have I heard him speak ill of anyone, not even of those people who have harmed him. Compare that with our own life. We constantly think ill of other people; it is not possible for us to be reaction-free even for half an hour out of the twenty-four.

The second component is control of the mind, *mana sanyam*. This means being able to guide and direct your mental expressions in a positive, creative and constructive manner. It means always being alert, able to pull the mind back from gravitating towards tamasic tendencies and directing it towards sattwic tendencies. When a negative thought comes, you stop it immediately and change it by coming back to a positive thought. This is like the practice of *Brahma vichara sadhana*, which involves extending your love and compassion, not only to those you love, but also to those you hate. In a similar manner, there should be the ability to recognize the state of mind that gravitates towards tamas and the strength to divert it towards sattwa.

The third component is *karma sanyam*, restraint over actions. This involves guiding each action so it leads to the most positive and fulfilling end. These three forms of sanyam are advocated in yoga in order to maintain the awareness of *sattwa*, of luminosity, light and wisdom. Once

we are able to maintain the state of sattwa, qualitative changes take place in our own life. It is at this level of karma sanyam that our inner qualities have to be managed through *swadhyaya*, self-understanding.

There are two practices that can be done. One is to change the existing attitude. Our actions and attitudes in life are governed by our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. We call this the SWAN principle: S for strength, W for weakness, A for ambition and N for need. Do you think that we can understand ourselves by asking 'Who am I?' No, it is an irrelevant question. The answer is simple: I am what I am. Self-analysis, self-observation, self-understanding begins by putting together the jigsaw puzzle of our life and learning to differentiate between strengths and weaknesses, and between ambitions and needs. *Swadhyaya* gives an in-depth understanding of our nature and what qualities make us respond in a particular manner.

Sometimes the weaknesses are so overpowering that we have low self-esteem, and confusion and doubts creep in. Sometimes the strengths are overwhelming, and we become overconfident, arrogant and rash. In this manner, many things can happen in each of the four stages, and understanding this is known as *swadhyaya*.

To practise SWAN, make a private list of your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. Just write it down one day and keep it. The next week write another set and keep it. Do this for four weeks; then, take all four reports, lay them out in front of you and compare them. You will find that some qualities have been added and some removed, but some will also be common throughout. Try to deal with the common ones first. As best as you can, cultivate those strengths, overcome those weaknesses, understand your ambitions and strive to attain your needs. This is your practice in *swadhyaya* and karma sanyam at the personal level.

The other practice you can do is at the level of interaction. When you go to bed at night, see yourself as if you are in a movie, starting your day from when you woke

up and ending when you went to bed. In your mind's eye, go through all those things you have done: what you had for breakfast, where you sat, with whom, what you were talking about, everything. Relive each and every moment of the day, and you will come across certain situations where you realize you should not have reacted in that manner. At that point, press the pause button of your daily movie. Think for five minutes, "If I were to encounter the same situation again, how would I react, knowing what I know now?" Then again press the play button and keep the movie going.

Continue to do this. Some events will repeat themselves again and again until they come in the ambit of your awareness and you notice, "This is where I am making a mistake. Either I am too weak or too aggressive. Here, I am not able to convey what I mean. There, maybe I am too open and people do not really care." In the course of time your behaviour and responses will change in relation to the external situations and environment. As they change, you will feel more satisfied, more fulfilled and content with yourself because you are putting your best foot forward.

We have taken a *sankalpa*, a resolution, to live like a human being and not like an animal that reacts to every situation. The first component in improving the quality of life is being aware that our efforts now guide our future destiny. The knowledge of oneself through swadhyaya contributes to improving the quality of sanyam in our life. That affects our karma and the present and future quality of our life.

The second component in improving our lives is realizing that in today's environment we should begin yoga with the practice of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, then move to the yamas and niyamas and adopt one in our life. At Bihar Yoga Bharati we give that discipline to the students. We tell them to select one yama and one niyama that they can perfect while they are living here. Some do it, some don't. Those who do can see the change in their life and connect with yoga in a much deeper and more sincere way.

The third component is the practice of sanyam: restraint of speech, thought and action. These three initial steps take you deeper into the yogic process that will touch and transform your life.

—4 December 2003

We react through our intellect and pretend it's from the heart. However, according to dharma, intellect or mind needs to be there. To what extent does the heart need to be there? Does the concept of thinking from the heart exist? Where is the dividing line between the mind and the heart? Is it possibly the same line between karma and dharma? Could karma be related to the heart and dharma to the intellect?

Don't confuse karma and dharma with heart and intellect. Dharma and intellect have opposite natures. Intellect is a linear process. Dharma is a creative process. It is like the difference between the right brain and the left brain. Dharma is a mixture of the left and the right. It is artistic, linear, mathematical and intuitive. Karma is the governing agent of the mind and the heart. It is not subservient to the heart or to the mind. It is the ruler of your life. How can you control the ruler of your mind through something that is not even remotely associated with it? Therefore, karma and dharma have nothing to do with the heart and mind.

Karma and dharma are eternal principles. Heart and mind change from moment to moment. If you try to link your karma or your dharma, then they are no longer karma and dharma; they become whims of your mind and heart. If you have had the experience of confronting the whims of the mind and the heart, do you want to go through the same again managing your karma and dharma? It will not work.

We are all guided by our karma. Action is karma, and the outcome of that karma should be dharma. This is the secret. In order to experience karma and dharma in our life, we have to use common sense, not necessarily the intellect or

the heart. Common sense is guided by both the brain and the heart, never by just one. If it is guided only by one, it is not common sense. There has to be something common between the mind and the heart for them to function as a unit and to bring forth a positive result. Common sense always gives good results if you use it. Sometimes knowledge gives negative results, but common sense gives appropriate results. For this reason, the intellect has to be transcended and purified.

Sri Aurobindo said, “In the beginning intellect was my friend. Now intellect is a barrier. Transcend it.” This statement applies to everyone. Initially, the intellect is used in an attempt to understand something that is incomprehensible to the mind. However, there comes a time when this creates a block in the natural, spontaneous and innocent expression of the self, and then we begin to falter; intellect becomes a barrier, and at that point one has to let go of the intellect.

What is the heart? Is it just an organ inside the ribcage, ticking away from the moment we are born to the moment we die, or is it a faculty? Just as the intellect is a faculty of the brain, of antahkarana, the heart is also a faculty. In English, ‘heart’ means the physical organ, yet the expression of the physical organ has not been defined. In Sanskrit it is defined as *bhava*, feeling, sentiment, an expression of innocence and simplicity, which is not guided by the intellect or the mind; it is natural and spontaneous. However, the faculty of the heart, the physical organ, is guided by the mind. The mind says, “This person is nice,” so the heart says, “All right, I’ll accept what you are saying,” and empathy, a connection, develops. A few moments later there is a struggle and the mind says, “This person is not as nice as I thought earlier,” and the heart says, “Fine.” There is a disconnection, and then there is headache and heartache.

Right now, it is not the heart that is guiding your mind; it is your mind that is guiding your heart; the intellect is guiding the bhavana. As long as the intellect is guiding

the bhavana, you will face emotional and psychological struggle and conflict. This makes the heart faculty tainted and impure. Intellect covers the luminosity of the feeling of the heart and gives it a different colour. Even in bhakti, the heart's feeling may be there, yet the mind intervenes. Even when you see God or guru, instead of feeling joy at having experienced that connection, the mind intervenes and says, "Go and ask God when will I be free from my troubles? When will my suffering end?" What is the use of seeing God when your focus is on your suffering?

You have to use your common sense, the common faculty of the heart and the intellect, to be able to discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate. When you are able to make this differentiation, you will become a yogi who knows the difference between the heart and the mind.

—10 December 2003



2004

I feel that past, present and future are all going on at the same time. Is this concept true?

Yes, it is a true concept. It is mentioned in the Upanishads that we live in three dimensions at the same time. Although you have very good indications and awareness of what you did one hour ago, you are not able to live that moment right now because that is past. Although there is a very good indication of what you will do after one hour when you go down to kitchen where you will sit and eat, you can't live that moment as the time has not yet come.

We are restricted and limited by time and it is a boon in disguise. Just imagine what would happen if you turn on your television and all the channels turn on at the same time. Will you enjoy it? Similarly, if you begin to live in past, present and future at the same time, you will not enjoy it. All these experiences will be superimposing on each other. Therefore, theoretically know that there is continuity of time. In theory there is no distinction between past, present and future in the absence of time. However, while we are here and subject to time, space and object, we live in the present. In our present, the past becomes a memory from which we learn, derive knowledge and inspiration, and the future becomes something to look forward to with hope and aspiration.

—4 February 2004

What is bhakti? How does it apply to us in our day-to-day practical life? Are bhakti yoga and karma yoga two sides of the same coin?

Bhakti yoga and karma yoga have been classified as separate yogas because, as the names indicate, they are separate. However, there is an important point that needs to be understood. Hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga and kriya yoga are all yoga practices, whereas karma yoga and bhakti yoga are states of mind achieved through yoga practices.

Just as there are eight stages of raja yoga, starting with the yamas and ending with samadhi, in the same manner, there are nine stages or practices of bhakti yoga. These practices lead to a state of mind that is finely tuned, pure, balanced, one-pointed, firm, without distractions and dissipations.

The twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted to bhakti yoga. It lists the qualities and state of mind of the *bhakta*, devotee or aspirant (12:18–19).

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhaduhkeshu samah sangavivarjitah.*

*Tulyanindaastutirmaunee santushto yenakenachit;
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaanme priyo narah.*

The one who is the same with friend and foe, in honour and dishonour, balanced in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and is free from attachment, to whom praise and reproach are equal, who is silently contemplative, content with anything, unattached to home, steady-minded and full of devotion: that person is dear to Me.

This description leads us to understand that bhakti is a way of confronting the negative and reactive components of the mind. When these components are brought under control, the mental sensitivity and clarity indicates bhakti.

Just as we define the process of raja yoga as yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, in the same manner, the nine stages of

bhakti indicate a process by which bhakti can be cultivated. However, each of the eight raja yoga practices has a different theory behind it, meaning raja yoga is made up of eight different theoretical bases.

The nine stages of bhakti guide the individual's involvement and participation to attain this fine-tuning of the mind and emotions. The nine forms of bhakti have been enumerated in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in other classical texts as well. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, in the 'Aranyakanda', the first form of bhakti is opening the mental doors to new ideas that can uplift you. It is being open, receptive and understanding. Associating with something virtuous can help to uplift your nature, whether it is a person, an idea, a thought or an action. Diverting the mind from external, sensual and sensorial involvement and fixing it in higher consciousness is a second form of bhakti. The third form of bhakti is becoming egoless, not by subjecting yourself to situations where you begin to think that you no longer have an ego, but by consciously working with your own personality. In this way, bhakti develops gradually.

If we look at bhakti in this manner, it becomes a much more intensive process than raja yoga. In pratyahara, you are simply an observer of the processes taking place in the mind, whereas in bhakti yoga you are not just the observer, but also the fine-tuner of the processes. Raja yoga involves alertness and awareness during the practice. Bhakti yoga involves twenty-four-hour awareness. You cannot practise the third form of bhakti by saying, "I will become egoless for one hour." You have to be egoless for twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year. Therefore, bhakti yoga is much more intense and involved than raja yoga, hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, or kriya yoga, which are practised at specific times.

The same applies to karma yoga. Karma yoga is not just hard physical work or sweeping the grounds. Karma yoga is another yoga of adjusting the mind to the circumstances in which we are involved, as with acceptance of a situation, our

responses become different. Karma yoga is not a one-hour yoga practice; it is awareness of the mind twenty-four hours a day. The balance, harmony and non-reactive state of the mind has to be maintained. Then, whether you are sitting quietly in a chair in meditation or involved in dynamic work, it becomes karma yoga.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna told Arjuna that karma yoga is most misunderstood. People associate it only with action and with having the right attitude during performance, yet that is not the essence of karma yoga. Karma yoga is the ability to adjust to situations and circumstances with a positive, dynamic and optimistic frame of mind. It is being able to observe, analyze, channel and control the reactions, the whims of the emotions, the acceptance or rejection of ideas, and all the while maintaining inner balance. We need to look at karma yoga and bhakti yoga as states of mind that have to be achieved, rather than as practices which have to be perfected.

In this regard, karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga complement each other, as without karma yoga, bhakti yoga cannot be achieved, and without jnana yoga, karma yoga cannot be perfected. Therefore, jnana yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga have to be practised simultaneously.

How does bhakti apply in our day-to-day practical life? Yoga hopes that whatever you attain is for your lifetime, so it must become part of your nature, character and expression, part of your life in total. However, if you only consider the day-to-day benefits of bhakti practice at a mental level, then the attainments are better focus, clarity, one-pointedness, conviction and confidence. These are the natural outcomes of having perfected bhakti yoga and karma yoga.

Bhakti yoga is not just the yoga of worship, rituals, kirtans, bhajans and mantras. Bhakti yoga is a simple yoga, in which the sattvic or balanced nature is established in our personality. It is the tamasic and rajasic nature that creates problems in our life, in the form of greed, ambition, aggression, desire, passions, fear, insecurity, lethargy, and

so on. Kirtans, mantras, even our own religious inclination, provide a direction by which we can experience bhakti. If we are someone who is not good at meditation, yet does kirtan and is able to go into the feeling, the kirtan can become a meditative experience. The chanting of mantras can induce higher, blissful states in the mind. However, bhakti becomes most fruitful when it is combined with the other yogas, as the aim of bhakti is to attain inner purity.

—24 April 2004

THE MATURE MIND

Yoga is a continuous process of development and cannot be learnt in a couple of years, yet once you have practised, studied and understood yoga, you will find that your daily moments become filled with yogic awareness. Yoga is not only asana and pranayama; it is an attitude, an awareness of your interaction with life and the ability to ensure smooth passage through moments of difficulty. Therefore, yoga is an ongoing process of education.

Education is not just an intellectual process or achievement; rather, education plays a vital part in the maturing of the human mind and consciousness. Maturity of mind and consciousness is the aim of education and is reflected in the ability to apply in practice the knowledge that you have gained intellectually. Knowledge is one thing and application is another. Knowledge without application is merely an intellectual achievement, yet when you begin to apply what you know, then the process of maturity of consciousness begins. When you are able to maintain your balance, harmony and peace in day-to-day situations, that is maturity of mind.

The mind is the agent that is interacting with the world through the senses, day in and day out. Whatever interacts with the world through the senses subjects itself to the pulls of opposites: *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion. It is

the mismanagement of attraction and repulsion that creates problems in life. If we are attracted to something, it is we who are attracted, yet we expect the other person or thing to reciprocate, and when that doesn't happen, attraction leads to frustration. Repulsion is the opposite reaction, whereby we try to repel things that continue to come to us no matter how much we try to avoid them, creating another cause of tension and anxiety. Through this mental disturbance, our balance is lost. In yoga, this loss of balance is known as being subjected to the pulls of the *vrittis*.

Managing the *vrittis*

There comes a time when the mind becomes hyperactive and so obsessed with thinking about something that it is not able to extract itself from the experience. Whether the object of fixation relates to thoughts about profession, family, security, or desire, it becomes so overpowering that we find it hard to move the mind away from it. Many times it may keep you awake at night and you pace around the room, thinking, 'Why can't I sleep? This is so unnecessary, I can think about it tomorrow.' You walk around the room, you turn on the TV, you read a book, you are exhausted, yet the moment you try to sleep, again the same thing comes up. You are unable to rest and the mind is persistently thinking that obsessive thought. That is known as *vritti*, the pull of the mind.

Sometimes the cause underlying this obsessive tendency can be understood. Sometimes the cause cannot be seen; it is too deep in the subconscious or unconscious mind. We may not know the cause of the obsession, yet we suffer the consequence. For help we go to a psychoanalyst, psychologist, counsellor or psychiatrist. They allow us to talk and talk, and they simply listen and try to discover a pattern which can lead them to the cause of the worry.

If we live the yogic attitude and awareness, we are able to witness and then realign our own patterns of energy. We learn to manage the mental and emotional energies. In practical life, that is the achievement of yoga. This

management of the vrittis is called *chitta vritti nirodhah*, which is a big achievement indicating maturity of mind. The process that allows you to continuously develop your inherent faculties, to live and express them in a spontaneous manner while being yourself, is the development of consciousness. This is our real education and this is the yogic process of evolution towards maturity.

Ego identification

If we look at ourselves, we will find that we always like to hide behind identities: “Who are you?” “I am a professor.” “I am a doctor.” “I am an engineer.” That is a professional identity, not a personal identity. The identity being created and projected externally to the world is a superficial persona. It is merely a mask that we put on to show or to hide behind. The purpose of such a front is to project ourselves as something better or more socially acceptable. We always think the front is a superior version of what we feel ourselves to be. In yogic terminology, this clinging to the mask, or the false presentation of oneself to the outside world, is known as ego-identification. This continuous ego-identification completely changes our inner balance and peace, and eventually leads to its destruction. However, yoga becomes a process in which we realize that ego-identification, and also know that it is harming us.

Purification

If we want to become truly natural and spontaneous, all pretences have to go. Purification of the ego, ridding ourselves of the pretences and masks is a trial by fire. Fire signifies a process of sadhana: *tapasya*, austerity; an effort resulting in the development of willpower and determination. Through these processes of discipline, we can remove the mask and emerge pure and triumphant like Sita when she came out of the fire.

This story about Rama and Sita is not commonly known. When Rama knew that the great war was imminent, he said

to Sita, "Look, now it is time for you to disappear and I will hide you in the fire. What will be with me will actually be your shadow Sita, not the real you but your duplicate." Rama hid Sita in the fire and thus ensured that the Sita who was kidnapped was only her shadow. He had to play his role to fulfil his duties by fighting the demons in order to bring peace and order to the world.

After the war was over and Ravana was killed, Rama played another trick in front of his army. In order to bring out the real Sita, he said to Vibhishana, the new king of Lanka, "I am not going to enter the city. Send Sita to my camp." So the shadow Sita came to Rama, who said very harshly, "Now that I have fulfilled all the duties of a warrior and you are free, you can go wherever you wish."

Everybody hearing Rama's words, including the entire army, was completely shocked, crying, "What! Rama is not accepting Sita? Why not?" Rama said, "You have to prove your purity." Sita's shadow, of course, knew exactly what Rama was doing and she played along. She said, "How can I prove my purity to you?" Rama said, "Jump in the fire." So the fire was lit, Sita's double entered the fire, and the real Sita came out. Then Rama said, "You are pure, come and sit beside me."

It was not the true Sita who was kidnapped and eventually liberated; it was only an illusion, and on the battlefield the shadow Sita was destroyed. Just as Sita went through the test of fire, for our real selves to emerge, we also have to undergo a process of discipline and training, and if the real you emerges, that will be the crowning glory of yoga in your life.

Emergence of peace

Only when we become pretence-free does peace comes into our life. Otherwise, meditation will not give us peace. It might give momentary relief, like cool water in the middle of summer. However, if we practise our meditation or yoga and yet do not let go of our pretences, whatever experiences

we have can only be temporary. They do not become part of our understanding and experience of everyday life, but remain separate. When all the pretences are removed and we become who we really are, the natural self, then we do not need to practise meditation. Meditation becomes part of our attitude, and that causes the dawn of peace in our life.

The emergence of inner peace enables us to feel harmony with nature at the outer level also. We are always worried about our limited relationships with our fellow beings: children, husband, wife, friends, society, yet these relationships are self-oriented. We have a much bigger relationship with the divine spirit and the transcendental nature. If we can really see this, and appreciate and acknowledge this relationship that we as individuals all share with the entire universe, with nature, with the transcendental reality called God, then our life becomes fulfilled. We connect with that source of strength and care, and the force of optimism. Then we can devote ourselves to uplifting others through wisdom, applying our knowledge in behaviour and attitude, and in that way help to fulfil the vision of the ancient seers.

—11 May 2004

How can we live in the presence of guru and God in our daily lives?

There are no guidelines on how to practise and live spiritual life. The basic framework has been given in the yogic, tantric and vedic traditions, yet ultimately we have to manage our own thoughts, ideas, beliefs and convictions. Until we do that, there is no spiritual development.

Spiritual development is not mechanical. It does not mean that if we do a certain practice, we will get a definite result. As long as we are doing something physical or mental, that is fine, as we know what the end result of asana and pranayama, or mantra practice, or meditation practice will be. However, it must be emphasized that the practices

can only lead us to a certain point. Beyond that we have to adjust, modify and alter our mental expressions and develop a new perspective. Developing a new vision marks the awakening of the spiritual faculty within us. Hatha yoga or raja yoga do not indicate the awakening of spiritual faculties; understanding, modifying and changing the mental vrittis indicates the beginning of spiritual awareness.

How do we modify or fine-tune our ideas, thoughts, convictions and beliefs, which are the basic building blocks of our nature? The answer has been given in the *Yoga Sutras*. The yamas and niyamas have to be lived. It is not necessary to practise all five yamas or all five niyamas; however, it is important to master one yama or one niyama.

The highest practice one can do to cultivate spiritual awareness is Ishwara pranidhana, which is the final niyama. *Ishwara pranidhana* means 'Let Thy will be done'. Allowing oneself to be the recipient of the divine will is the highest virtue that can be cultivated. It is the highest state of mind that can be developed and experienced. It is the culmination of jnana, the culmination of bhakti and the culmination of karma. When *jnana*, knowledge, *bhakti*, faith or devotion, and *karma*, behaviour or performance, fuse into one and are directed to the fulfilment of the divine will, then that becomes the highest state we can aspire for as spiritual aspirants. Ishwara pranidhana indicates letting go of the personal hang-ups, the personal attachments and the holding on to things that we consider dear.

Remember that contentment, *santosha*, comes before Ishwara pranidhana. Ishwara pranidhana is the last of the niyamas. If you follow the sequence of the yamas and niyamas, it is number ten. Beyond that, there is no other yama or niyama. Being number ten, Ishwara pranidhana indicates that a certain amount of preparation has taken place already and you are experiencing the divine will. Through the generation of faith and innocence, letting go of the self-oriented, self-centred awareness, one is able to finally tune oneself to God's energy or guru's energy.

Ishwara pranidhana also indicates a level of surrender wherein we are not subject to our mental whims and desires. In normal life, we find it difficult to surrender to something that is different from us. It is even difficult to surrender to God or to guru. If we try, certain thoughts come, certain influences affect our belief, doubt creeps in, questioning begins and we again fall prey to the mental influences. Christ's disciples had to face doubts. Spiritual aspirants who are trying to follow a spiritual lifestyle have to face those confusions and doubts, as surrender is never complete in our lives.

Surrender simply means not being a slave to the mental whims, fantasies and desires. Presently, we have surrendered ourselves to our mind. The mind says, "Do this." We do it. The mind says, "Say this." We say it. The mind says, "Desire this." We desire it. The mind says, "Reject that." We reject it. We have become slaves of our mind. The real meaning of surrender is coming out of this situation and surrendering to the cosmic, divine nature, becoming master of the mind and tuning oneself with the Higher Self. This surrender is the first step of Ishwara pranidhana: 'Let Thy will be done.' It is also a philosophy, a concept, an idea that we try to develop. One who can develop this philosophy and live accordingly, who can cultivate that spiritual strength and energy within, is recognized as a disciple and eventually, in the course of time, as an enlightened being.

The highest spiritual value to be cultivated in life is Ishwara pranidhana. The moment you live that, your yoga also reaches its point of culmination. Ishwara pranidhana is identifying with the pure inner nature. Once you have identified with your inner nature, you have attained Ishwara pranidhana, and you do not remain you. That is the turning point in the aspirant's life.

Everything is guided by our ego. Our thoughts are guided by the ego, our expectations are motivated by the ego, our efforts are energized by the ego, our responses and reactions and identifications are associated with the ego. If you have a confrontation with your enemy, do you react to

the person or to the ideology that person conveys to you? There is a clash of egos; you both have different viewpoints, and the person and the ideology become separate. Most of the time you will react to the person, for there is no acknowledgement of the ideology. If there was recognition of the ideology then the person would be redundant and become the follower of the ideology. However, we always watch the person and we respond accordingly.

Our response is not to the person; rather, it is to the reaction that we feel within us for that person, such as anger or hatred. Therefore, we are responding to our own emotion. We are reacting to our own anger. These are the traits that a psychologist or psychoanalyst tries to discover about the cause of a disturbance or imbalance. Again, it is so coloured by the ego that it becomes impossible to know when we are reacting and with what we are identifying. We are identifying with ourselves, and definitely not with the other person or with the situation.

The practice of Ishwara pranidhana is identifying with your inner nature. If you experience Ishwara pranidhana, you have let go of the identification with jealousy and anger, with desires and passions, with all the so-called 'normal' responses. Once this identification is gone, one's responses change and are no longer self-oriented. Instead of being focused on oneself, one is now focused outwards like the beam of a torch.

Ishwara pranidhana is not only a mental sadhana. Outer changes also help to attain Ishwara pranidhana. What made St Francis of Assisi a saint? It was not his realization of God or Christ, or religion, or his compassion and love; it was the vow he had taken of poverty and chastity. To move from a life of luxury to a life of poverty and to maintain the discipline is very difficult. Do we have the capacity to make external changes in our life, to take a vow and live it; or are we too weak and infirm? A vow, or *vrata*, reflects a change in lifestyle. Test yourself. Undergo a little physical hardship. One night per week sleep on a mattress on the floor. One

day per week miss one meal and have something light to eat for the next. In this manner, by adjusting certain situations and conditions and disciplining yourself little by little, you will find that your lifestyle will influence your mind and your mental receptivity.

The yamas and niyamas are not a mental process only; they are a process by which you become aware of yourself. As you become aware of yourself, you have to fine-tune your responses, yet at the same time, the outer external change and discipline is equally important. Without it, the yamas and niyamas cannot be lived.

—30 July 2004

YOGA AND CHILDREN

Yoga is a very important subject for children. Just as we go to school to be educated and to increase the capacity of our intellect, when we practise yoga we increase our capacity to learn much more.

When the famous saint, Swami Vivekananda, was living in Chicago, USA, he used to go to the library, borrow large volumes of books, take them home and return them the next day. After some time the librarian became curious and asked him, “Why do you take out so many books when you cannot possibly read them all in one day?” Swami Vivekananda replied that he read each and every page of every book. The librarian could not believe it, so Swami Vivekananda asked her to test him. She opened a book, selected a page and a paragraph, and asked him to tell her what was written there. Swami Vivekananda repeated the sentence exactly as it was written in the book, without looking at it. The librarian was astounded and did more tests. Each time Swami Vivekananda repeated the exact words written in the book.

The librarian later discovered that Swami Vivekananda had a photographic memory. He did not have to read books. His eyes, his mind, would capture the image on the page,

and whenever he wished, he could just recall a book, a page, a sentence. That was the capacity of his brain and mind. How did he develop this capacity? He did not have it when he was ordinary Narendra, before he became Swami Vivekananda. His life story tells us that he had many difficulties and problems in his early life. Yet, when he started to practise yoga with sincerity, he was able to develop that quality of the brain known as photographic memory.

We can also develop the potential and quality of our brain and mind provided we know how to use and apply yoga. Yoga is not a subject for spiritual development or spiritual realization; rather, as the tradition says, yoga is a subject for dealing with the mind. As students, you have faced your mind. You know how difficult it is to focus on study, how difficult it is to remember things, how at examination time, despite being full of confidence, all the effort you have put into your studies suddenly dissipates and your mind becomes blank in the exam room. Most people have had that experience. We know that to deal with the brain and to develop its potential is very difficult. However, yoga provides the solution.

Exams, memory and concentration

Students often ask how to develop concentration, how to face exams without getting nervous, and how to memorize. One of the faculties of mind is memory, another is intellect, and another is understanding. Intellect, memory and understanding are the three faculties that students have to manage.

In the past, people have thought a lot about how to improve the quality of the body and mind. The yoga techniques were devised in accordance with the natural laws of the body. The body has many glands and in children the most important one is the pineal gland in the centre of the head, which is responsible for the development of the cerebral, mental faculty. Yoga says that if you can maintain the health of the pineal gland, which begins to decay after

the age of eight, then the learning process, the capacity to retain information, and the memory improve.

To maintain the health of the pineal gland, three techniques were devised. The first is surya namaskara. The second is trataka for developing concentration. The third is pranayama to balance the two hemispheres of the brain.

Surya namaskara

The practice of surya namaskara is composed of five different postures which influence different organs and glands in the body, ensuring they perform in an optimum manner. *Surya namaskara* means 'salute to the sun'. It is to be practised in the morning, when it is calm and quiet, when you are fresh and not under tension and stress from study. It is done to improve the circulation of the blood, to energize the different parts and organs of the body, and to control the breath.

The breath plays a very important role. When you are angry, or tense, or frustrated, your breathing will become shallow and very fast. When you are relaxed and peaceful, the breathing will be deep and long. Scientifically, it has been proven that the breath controls many activities of the brain and that with control of the breath, we can alter the state of the mind, reduce the stress level in the brain and nervous system, and experience harmony and tranquillity.

Trataka

Trataka is the most effective practice for developing concentration. During exam time, if you do five minutes before you begin your studies, you will find it very useful. Light a candle and place it so that the flame is at eye level. Look straight at the flame without blinking the eyes for half a minute, or as long as you are able to keep your eyes open. When you feel the need, close your eyes and see the after-image of the flame in front of the closed eyes. When the after-image disappears, the screen in the forehead becomes black. When this happens, open the eyes and again look at the flame

without blinking the eyes. Whenever you close your eyes, you will see the after-image of the flame and you look at that. You will find that the image moves, it will not remain static. Sometimes it will move up, to the left, to the right, or down: it will keep moving. Therefore, you have to make an effort to hold that image fixed at one point and not allow it to move. Do this for five minutes before going to sleep and before you begin your studies. In a couple of days you will find you are able to memorize and retain whatever you read more easily. This practice develops mental concentration. It is most important for success in studies.

Pranayama

Bhramari pranayama, plugging the ears and humming like a bee, balances the two hemispheres of the brain. One part of the brain is known as the right brain and the other part is known as the left brain. Often, in the right brain there is nothing left, and in the left brain there is nothing right! When there is nothing left in the right brain and nothing right in the left brain, you cannot focus, concentrate, study or succeed in life. In order to integrate the faculties of both hemispheres of the brain, there is a practice known as nadi shodhana pranayama.

Nadi shodhana has to be done in a specific way. First of all, imagine a staircase. If we look at a staircase from the side, we will see the steps. We have to coordinate our breath as if we are climbing the steps. For example, if we have to climb seven steps in one breath, we visualize, we breathe in and step up, we hold the breath, we breathe in, step up, we hold the breath, we breathe in, step up, and so on. In this way, one inhalation is broken into seven steps. Then we breathe out in the same manner, so the exhalation is also in seven steps.

First close the right nostril. Breathe in, hold; breathe in, hold; breathe in, hold; seven times. You take seven steps in one breath. Then breathe out and come down the seven steps in the same way. Next, close the left nostril, open the right nostril, and again breathe in, hold; breathe in, hold;

for a total of seven steps. Then breathe out and come all the way down the seven steps. If you feel any strain, reduce the number of steps. Repeat the same pattern about five times with each nostril to complete the practice of nadi shodhana pranayama. If you understand and try this practice, you will find that the retention capacity of the brain will increase. You will be able to memorize and concentrate with much less effort.

To succeed in your studies and to develop control over the mind, these three practices are a must.

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal

The children who have been demonstrating the practices today are from Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (Children's Yoga Fellowship). BYMM has about 81,000 members aged between eight and fourteen, and they look after their own organization and manage their own affairs. After the age of fourteen, the children retire from this organization and join another one for teenagers. Until the age of fourteen, we teach basic yoga practices only. Over the years, we have found that many children who are weak in their studies initially are able to give excellent performances. There have been times when the children have been occupied in teaching yoga to other children in different parts of the country and have not had time for their own studies. Then, just before the exams, they go through their books, take the exam and come in the merit list. We don't teach the children many practices, only the most basic ones which students can use to improve their studies and mind.

Yoga nidra

Here is a success story. Once a small boy came to the ashram and although he was never sent to school, he was taught science, arts, commerce, languages, and so on, by a special practice known as yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is a technique that you can do before you fall asleep in bed at night; however, you need a teacher to guide you. While the boy

was sleeping, his teacher would give him instructions, which would be registered by the mind. Often the teacher would read chapters from books. The next day, when the boy was awake, he would read the same chapter and the boy would say, "I know that subject. I know the content," and he would be able to describe what was written in the chapter. This was an experiment, and it shows that our mind is able to register information even when we are asleep.

Later, we did an experiment where we gave a young German girl the practice of yoga nidra and taught her various things during this type of sleep. When her parents sent her to school, she came home on the first day and said, "I don't need to go any more because I already know everything they are teaching there." When she was put into the next class, she said the same thing. Today that girl has attended school very little and still knows all the subjects. Tests have been taken and she has passed every one. She is only fourteen now, yet last year she was admitted into a college. This is an example of how the technique of yoga nidra can work on the human mind. This is the effect of yoga, therefore you have to give yoga a chance in your life.

Make yoga a habit

If you are sincerely committed to the practice of yoga, within one year you will be a different student. If for one year you practise surya namaskara, trataka and nadi shodhana pranayama seriously, your problems will change. Whereas today you say you have difficulty in concentration and attention, next year you will be saying you have outgrown your school and cannot obtain admission anywhere because you are too young. Therefore, you decide which problem you want to face: lack of concentration or the problem of excellence.

The problem of excellence means you have committed yourself. Therefore, do not think of yoga as a set of physical exercises that we do for health or for eradicating disease or illness; think of yoga as a way to improve and develop the

strength and quality of the brain and the mind. Then you will have a very successful life, all the way from your studies to your future life. This is the message of yoga for all of you: practise yoga with such determination and dedication that it becomes a habit in your life.

—Talk to school students in Kolkata, September 2004

Please explain the sanyam to evolve the mind with the heart.

Sanyam is usually defined as ‘restraint’ in English, yet ‘restraint’ does not convey the exact meaning. The word sanyam is composed of the two Sanskrit roots *sam* and *yam*. *Yam* is like *yama* in the *Yoga Sutras*: a state of mind that you hold and are able to cultivate and develop. *Sam* means total: the total personality, the total expression, the total behaviour, all the dimensions of human nature. Therefore, *sanyam* literally means that all the dimensions of the human personality are taken through a process of transformation and beautification, and that state is maintained and developed.

Sanyam works at various levels: first the sensorial level, second the mental level, and then at the psychic and spiritual levels. Sanyam, or the process of transformation, applies to each and every expression in life, including behaviour, attitude, speech and thought.

What is the purpose of sanyam? The psychoanalysts of the past and modern ages have described different states of consciousness. The mind is the interactive consciousness, the surface of consciousness. There are further classifications according to the intensity of experience: conscious, *jagrat*; subconscious, *swapna*; and unconscious, *sushupti*. Yet, what is the conscious mind, what is the subconscious mind and what is the unconscious mind?

We can describe the experience of *jagrat* and how one responds to the activities of the conscious mind. Right now you are outside and there is light everywhere, everything is

illuminated. You can see as far as you want to see, there are no obstructions in the way: that is the conscious dimension. However, you cannot be aware of the entire conscious dimension at the same time, just as you cannot be aware of your total surroundings or environment at the same time. You don't know what is happening behind you, yet you are not sleeping. You don't know what is happening beside you, yet your eyes are open. You don't know what is happening below you, yet you are aware. So where is the focus?

Here is an example. You are looking at me, the torchlight of your attention is on me, yet many things are happening around you. There is the sound of birds singing and the noise of cars and music. There are objects, trees, flowers and buildings around you and behind you. You know they exist, yet if you want to bring them into focus, you have to consciously listen to them or look at them. The focus, the torchlight of consciousness, is awareness, attention. If you look somewhere, the consciousness shifts. You are awake, you are not sleeping, you are not dreaming or fantasizing, yet if you simply look away, the focus shifts. Therefore, even in the conscious dimension, the awareness is limited to the present experience that the senses are attached to.

The senses have their own limitations; they cannot be aware of the entire creation all at the same time. You can look north, east, south or west, yet not in all four directions simultaneously. That is the nature of jagrat consciousness. Everything is illuminated, yet the focus of awareness is only on one object, which is highlighted due to its involvement with the senses. What happens in this process? While you are watching that building, someone behind you gets out a gun and takes aim at you. The same thing happens in the mind also. All these various expectations and ambitions that you cannot face develop. They manifest while you are looking the other way. You do not even know where they have come from, yet suddenly you find yourself confronting that obsessive passion, that obsessive aggression, for no apparent rhyme or reason. One minute ago you were at peace with

yourself and one minute later you are disturbed. All this play happens in jagrat, the conscious level.

What is swapna, the subconscious? Inside the building there is light, but no direct sunlight. It is dim, and if you need to work there, you turn on the light. The light in each area of the building illuminates a particular area only. The subconscious is like the conscious mind, but instead of being fully illuminated by the all-pervasive sunlight, it is now illuminated in parts by individual bulbs, which represent the memory, the impressions, the thoughts, ambitions, strengths, weaknesses, desires and passions. All these areas are being illuminated independently, not by homogeneous lighting, but by individual bulbs which only illuminate that particular area. Therefore, when you go to swapna, it is neither bright nor dark. Each bulb represents an individual experience, memory or quality. That is the subconscious.

The characteristic of the unconscious is absence of light, absence of awareness, absence of knowledge or experience. Everything exists, yet there is no connection, no relationship, just as the colours and forms of trees and flowers exist at night, but you don't see them. Everything continues to exist, waiting for the light to shine. This is the unconscious.

The activities and contents of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious are reflected in our life and in our character. In each individual, the limited conditioned nature is tamasic. The purpose of sanyam is to transform these tamasic states of consciousness, which at present are focused only on association between the senses and the object, so we can derive the appropriate wisdom and experience.

If you want to generate electricity from a flowing river, first you need to contain the flow by building a dam that holds it, lets it build up and gradually, in a controlled manner, allows it to pass through an outlet with force, thus creating another type of power, hydroelectric power. You are not drying up the entire riverbed; you are ensuring that the normal flow in the river becomes the cause of a greater

energy source for a particular purpose. This controlled and guided action is known as sanyam.

The practice of sanyam is firstly sensorial. The association with the senses: visual and tactile impressions, smells, sounds, taste, has to be curbed, as it is the senses that give birth to cravings and desires. The eyes look at a flower. They recognize and appreciate the beauty, the colour, the smell. Suddenly a desire comes: "It's beautiful, I want it!" It is natural for this desire to come up. However, this desire has two parts: the first part is recognizing that the flower is beautiful, the second part is wanting to possess it. The association of the sense organs with the object has given birth to a desire to possess it. The beauty was seen by the eyes, yet the idea of possession came after the beauty was appreciated by the mind. This applies to everything: luxuries, houses, cars, stereo sets, TV sets, boyfriends, girlfriends, everything comes in this purview, and then emotional and intellectual responses are evoked.

Managing these emotional responses is the next item of sanyam. If you stop at the point where you say, "The flower is beautiful," that is sanyam. If you bring to the second part, "I wish to possess it," then it is no longer sanyam; it becomes *swartha*, selfishness. Sanyam is appreciation of beauty; *swartha* is the desire to possess it. Sensorial sanyam has to come first. There is nothing wrong with a desire for pizza, but if you think about it every day, the desire becomes an obsession. Therefore, first the senses have to be managed through sanyam.

After the senses, the four instincts: *ahara*, craving for fulfilment and satisfaction; *nidra*, craving for relaxation, sleep and comfort; *bhaya*, insecurities and fears; and *maithuna*, sensual passions, have to be managed through sanyam. We become so caught up in our own instinct-generated thoughts that we bind ourselves to different ideas, objects, environments and climates, both external and internal. If we can learn not to bind ourselves through the tiny proddings and associations of the instincts then a lot of mental and psychological problems can be solved.

One simple idea can become an obsession and become so powerful that it can change your mental attitude and behaviour completely. This is known as instinct and often there is no conscious control over it. Many people's behaviour is compulsive; they are compelled to behave in a certain manner. Some people cannot live without being negative; they will always find a way to pass a snide remark, yet they don't realize they have done so. This absence of awareness of one's own actions, behaviour and attitude is also changed by sanyam.

It can be said that food is required for the body, pleasure for the mind and sanyam for the soul or *atma*. The body cannot survive for long without food. Food nourishes and vitalizes the body, therefore we exist. Food creates prana, which maintains the physical structure. If you don't eat, the prana will gradually become depleted, the vitality will go and the body will become weak and sick.

Pleasure plays the same role for the mind. If one is continually under pressure and tension, the mind gets bogged down in a very black state from which it cannot extract itself. To remove that state, pleasure is necessary. It refreshes the mind; it refreshes the mental pranas. If you read a good book, the mind changes. If you watch a good movie, play, joke and laugh, there is a temporary shift. These temporary shifts take the mind away from its areas of frustration and anxiety, and revitalize it.

Sanyam plays the same role for the soul. The soul is an energy. It is a shakti like the mind is a shakti; however, it is more subtle than the mind. The body is the gross manifest form of this shakti, the mind is the subtle form of this shakti, and the spirit is the causal form of this shakti. Are we looking at the body and mind and ignoring the soul? We take care of the body and mind as we identify with them, and they are more visible, tangible and understandable, yet the spirit is the real Self within us, and that energy becomes affected by the states of the mind and body.

The only way to release the energy of the spirit is through sanyam. In this context, sanyam means to hold a balanced

attitude so that the instincts, obsessive desires and dim, unlit areas of the psyche that drag us away from expressions of the heart or soul can no longer distract us. We restrain selfish impressions that the mind or the senses would naturally gravitate towards. In this way, sanyam helps realign the consciousness so we express the energies of the soul.

The body, mind, emotions and spirit have to be seen as one unit. In this way, we can understand how to reach the dimension of the spirit by using the body and mind to express compassion and love, the language of the heart.

Sanyam in itself is a complete sadhana that can take a whole lifetime to perfect. You can perfect any posture in one month. You can learn kriya and kundalini yoga and have good experiences in six months. However, to master sanyam can take a whole lifetime of persistence every day, fine-tuning the radio of the head, fine-tuning the radio of the emotions and fine-tuning the radio of the sensorial experiences.

Real yoga is sanyam, not asana, pranayama and meditation, as sanyam transforms and beautifies the entire dimension of the human personality. Asana, pranayama and meditation are only pastimes, fun and games, ways to enjoy life; the real yoga is sanyam.

—22 October 2004

What is the difference and similarity between non-attachment and indifference?

Indifference means absence of caring, sympathy, participation and involvement. Non-attachment simply means that you are not obsessed by your attachments. When our feelings and emotional bonds are handled properly, it is non-attachment, and when they are not handled properly, it is attachment. Attachment is the outcome of identifying with the ego, desire or expectation. Non-attachment means observing that identification and managing the results, rather than being carried away by the force of the identification.

In attachment there is caring, sympathy, the need to possess, to cherish, to own, to be happy and content. In non-attachment all these things remain; the only difference is that now you have the ability to manage the outcome of the attachment, and you are not obsessively involved with the object or area of attachment.

—22 October 2004

The *Bhagavad Gita* says to do karma, yet not for the fruits. In business, don't you have to be aware of the fruits?

Being selfless does not mean that you do everything for free, as charity. Being selfless is an attitude in which the first consideration is the wellbeing of the other person. That consideration motivates your course of action and its implementation. Karma yoga is planning an action and anticipating both the positive and the negative, whereas karma is just running into action, without any anticipation of whether it is right or wrong, and then crying about it.

We have to change our perspective and attitude towards ourselves and towards our participation in life. Social ills, personal problems and conflicts will always exist in the world, and there is no way we can avoid or remove them. Therefore, it is advisable to learn how to accept and manage them. To manage them, you don't have to look for solutions in the scriptures, or from a counsellor, a book, a master or a teacher. You just have to work with yourself and cultivate a different dimension of your personality. This is the aim of yoga. It allows you to live just as the gentle, soft tongue lives surrounded by thirty-two strong, sharp and hard teeth.

—22 October 2004

How should we deal with our own negativity while teaching?

First you need to remember that you are not the teacher. When you think of yourself as the teacher, that thought

blocks learning. A student will never block learning. Instead of identifying yourself as a teacher, become a more humble student. The humble student eventually becomes a true teacher, as he doesn't close the door of learning.

When you teach yoga, you teach asana, pranayama, shatkarma, meditation, and so on. There are discussions about the practices, and at the end of the course the participants leave with their certificate or diploma. This is the trend of yoga teaching, yet it is only classroom teaching. No instructions are given about how to become a perfect teacher. Yoga teaching is not confined to the physical or mental practices of yoga. Excellence in performing asanas does not indicate good teaching. Communication skills are also not the criterion of a good teacher. Reading books on yoga and talking about them is not an indication of a good teacher. People are not taught how to become good teachers.

What are the requirements of a yoga teacher? As long as we are teaching only asana, pranayama, body work, bone work, muscle work and energy work, we are in tune with our bodies, with our movements, with our breath; however, we are not managing our mind. We are controlling the body, not the mind. We ensure that the body performs the postures in the correct manner, yet the mind is left free to wander around, to think whatever it wants to think.

Along with training in asana and pranayama, teachers should be given a specific sadhana to improve their teaching ability and to deal with all their own mental stuff. As a rule, every teacher must maintain a diary in which they should make an effort to imbibe, implement and practise the principles of yoga, not only the practices of yoga. Pick up one principle of yoga and work with it for a month, so that it becomes your sadhana as a teacher for a month. Then pick up another principle and work with that for another month, and keep on working in this way.

What are these principles? Many yoga teachers do not know what their strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs are. Therefore, yoga teachers must practise the SWAN

principle of sadhana regularly. Just as you prepare your classes by turning the pages of a book and making notes, and you get ready to go out in public to give a class or lecture, in the same manner, you should be able to look at the diary and recognize what you are and where you are, and what is highlighted in your life at that moment. Which strength is highlighted, which weakness is highlighted, which is circumstantial, which is internal, which is a samskara, which is a desire. In that way, teachers must monitor their own mental states.

The teacher must also make an effort to be in a positive state of mind before teaching the classes. How? Not by coming home from work, changing your clothes in a rush, and jumping into a yoga class with all the stresses of your work, so that you are teaching the students to relax while your own mind is under pressure and tension. Before giving a yoga class, teachers should ensure that they are in the right frame of mind to give the class by doing ten minutes of meditation. In those ten minutes of meditation they should identify with a principle of yoga and become that principle of yoga.

Swami Sivananda has given very clear indications on the yogic principles that one should try to imbibe in life. They are known as the Eighteen ITIES: serenity, regularity, absence of vanity, sincerity, simplicity, veracity, equanimity, fixity, non-irritability, adaptability, humility, tenacity, integrity, nobility, magnanimity, charity, generosity and purity. As a teacher, for one month, practise serenity for ten minutes before your class, and then give the class, maintaining that state of serenity. As a yoga teacher, for one month, practise absence of vanity. First, observe your vanity, then try to control your reactions, your ego, your pride, and give the class, observing yourself, as well as the students.

Yoga teachers should become more humble students, as along with teaching in the class, they should be learning to manage themselves. When we have the idea of teaching, we identify with the ego. When there is ego identification,

connecting with yogic principles is not possible. Telling people how to practise yoga or how to teach yoga is not really the criterion of a yoga teacher. In order to excel as a yoga teacher, after the training, you have to identify with the principles of yoga, rather than with the practices. Teach people the practices of yoga, but for yourself practise the principles of yoga. Only by training yourself in how to manage your own mental agitation and negativity can you become a good yoga teacher.

—7 November 2004

What qualities make a real yoga teacher?

You will find the answer in the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Jonathan Livingston Seagull was a brash young seagull who wanted to learn how to fly the fastest. He experienced both success and failure in life, yet ultimately became a master. At the end, when the young seagulls came to him to learn how to fly, he simply told them, “Let us begin with the basics.” A person who can say, “Let us begin with the basics” is a true yoga teacher. However, a person who tries to fulfil the expectations of the students, forgetting the basics, is not a yoga teacher. Every system has a discipline. When you start learning maths, you do not jump to higher maths or algebra straight away; you start with simple addition and subtraction. That is how a yoga teacher should begin, regardless of what people think.

Yoga teachers must have a plan and stick to it. They should not change the plan according to the student’s opinion. We tend to get swayed by different opinions, as we think that unless we teach what the students are seeking or expecting to learn, they will go to another teacher and we will lose the revenue. This idea creates a phobia in the teacher’s mind, and then it is difficult to teach yoga properly. The teaching of yoga should not be altered, restricted or constrained by the ideas of the students who come to the class. You should have a plan and follow that plan.

In your plan, always begin with the basics and try to be a simple yoga teacher. During the learning process you should study the different methods and their intricate details, yet when it comes to teaching, always begin with the basics. As a yoga teacher, when you become more complex, it goes above the head. Therefore, simplicity of instruction, simplicity of practice and simplicity in guiding the students should become the hallmark of a yoga teacher. Do not try to show or prove that you know more than other teachers.

—7 November 2004

How can we become better teachers of the Satyananda system of yoga?

The first point is to deepen your understanding of yoga and upgrade your teaching skills. Why? It is because there have been big changes between Swami Satyananda's early teachings and what we teach today. The original intention of the practices and instructions, and how Sri Swamiji presented them initially, is not something that many teachers have been exposed to.

An understanding of Sri Swamiji's original approach to the practices is necessary in order to fully comprehend our yogic system and tradition. We need to come back to basics in our own teaching process, as the original purpose and meaning of yoga gets lost in the continuity. Every time a new teacher starts yoga classes, the style, the intention, the words: the entire teaching changes. We have all gone our own way, with good intentions, but with limited understanding, with role-playing and agendas. Therefore, the idea is to go back to basics, to keep things simple, to fall back on the simplicity of the practices.

As teachers, we have touched upon the needs that people want fulfilled through yoga, yet we have not touched upon the essence of yoga. While teaching Satyananda Yoga, we have never defined the actual practices in the manner that Swami Satyananda taught them. Therefore, the idea is not to look into new developments or ways of presenting yoga,

but to go back to the original teachings and understand the perspective of Swami Satyananda. If we, as teachers, are not clear on what we can do to make the techniques easier, simpler, more understandable and in-depth, the whole concept of yoga is lost over a period of time. Then any organization becomes a commercial organization, and the individual teacher a commercial teacher. Even today Sri Swamiji insists that yoga should be as simple as possible, without trappings, only what is necessary to make people understand and reconnect with the essence.

—11 November 2004

How should we approach yoga teaching?

It is important to remember that we are not yoga teachers, but *sadhakas* or spiritual aspirants. Yoga teaching is our profession and sadhana. As a professional activity we may teach yoga to various groups: beginners, intermediate and advanced, and plan accordingly so that we are able to develop our professionalism. However, an effort has to be made to identify ourselves not as yoga teachers, but as sadhakas. So let us first change the concept in our mind.

There is a professor teaching physics in a classroom and a professor experimenting with physics in the laboratory. The classroom teacher has the theory, yet the laboratory worker is actually involved in and experimenting with that theory. We are the ones working in the laboratory; we have to experiment, observe, analyze and develop. Then our teaching role changes: we actually become sadhakas, experimenters, and not teachers, exponents or speakers. This is one point we should understand as yoga trainers, teachers, or the head of a group or centre: that we are sadhakas and we teach students sadhana.

Whatever course we give, it is not just a yoga course. We try to go one step beyond by providing a direction for the student to develop. The direction is given either in the form of a home practice or some other form where that continuity

and inspiration can be maintained. Those people who want to go deeper can do so. There has to be that option of not perceiving yoga as a morning practice, but as an understanding that involves continuous effort. Therefore, the approach to teaching has to be that of a sadhaka, not that of a teacher.

—11 November 2004

How can we keep a balanced attitude among the many demands of teaching?

We have to be very clear about the qualities we are looking for that can help us improve our professional and individual performance. *Sanyam*, or a balanced attitude, is important, yet we have to cultivate this step by step. In the cultivation of *sanyam*, there has to be an analysis of our needs, responsibilities and opportunities. Balance among the three will bring about *sanyam*.

What is the need? Perhaps you are running your own centre, and it does not have the support of many people. It is an independent organization, managed simply by one or two people, with one or two other teachers, or maybe none. In this case, the needs for your personal life and for the maintenance of the centre are clearly defined: finances, structures and facilities. In a bigger organization the same needs are magnified, maybe ten to a hundred times. Next, we have to create an opportunity to fulfil the need, and then we have to be responsible for the fulfilment of the opportunities and needs. This is where planning comes in.

We must plan according to our resources, maybe a small class or a big class, a weekend seminar or a week-long in-house seminar. These three aspects of need, opportunity and responsibility must be defined on a long-term as well as a short-term basis. Ask yourself, for example, “How many courses can I conduct this year and what should be the direction in my teaching? Should I teach only hatha yoga, or include other yogas? What kind of assistance will I need?”

A balance of these three aspects will lead to sanyam, clarity and wisdom in professional life.

Often we become insecure when we are unable to reach our target, to fulfil the plans that we had set out with. There may be a deficit of finances, facilities, assistance or other things, which causes uncertainty to set in. We then go into overdrive, thinking about how to manage the situation. In that state we may take on too much and spread ourselves too thin, leading us to feel that there are so many things to do and we have no grip on the situation. That insecurity has to be managed at a personal level. It may result in worry, anxiety, frustration, or manifest in other ways. However, the important thing is to analyze our confidence before going into overdrive under the influence of that anxiety. This is where the balanced attitude of sanyam comes in.

Where there is confidence and competence, we should go ahead. However, when we feel that things are getting out of control, we need to restructure again with firmness. Checking our attitude in the course of our daily affairs is important. The more work we create, the more involved we become in those details, and the less able we are to apply our mind to the bigger picture.

This is what we have to look into and assess: where we are now, which goals we wish to achieve, and whether our aspirations can support our professional life. Then we should try to make the process simpler, more efficient and effective. We need to recognize what we are, what our aspirations are and then adjust our professional life accordingly, whether in administration, teaching or interaction with people. We can try to be more aware of the present and open to the future.

—11 November 2004

2005

Why are gifts given in the ashram? What is meant by daan, bhet, prasad and akshat?

To accumulate is basic to human nature. It happens on all levels: physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, psychic and spiritual. Accumulation is known as *bhoga*, enjoyment. We derive enjoyment from collecting things, and we become attached to them. If somebody we love and respect gives us a pen, we will keep it for years, and when the time comes to part with it, suddenly it has sentimental value. Bhoga is the outcome of the association between the senses and sense objects.

The five senses give birth to different experiences. Through the skin we experience touch, through the eyes sight, through the ears sound, through the nose smell, through the tongue taste. The senses are in continual association with their sense objects. When the eyes see a beautiful flower we want to possess it, so we take the flower. When we eat, the taste buds in contact with the food create a feeling, a desire, a need, and we want more until we are fully satisfied. When the nose follows a nice smell, we derive enjoyment and pleasure.

Bhoga is enjoyment; however, when it is not balanced then *roga* or disease develops. If we eat too much because we like the taste, we will have digestive problems. Excessive

enjoyment always gives birth to problems, which the body and mind have to face. When enjoyment is balanced, it is known as yoga. Bhoga represents the rajasic tendency. Roga represents tamasic overindulgence. Yoga represents the sattwic aspect, the proper management of the senses and sense objects.

Accumulation and possessiveness are basic traits in bhoga. These traits are seen more in some people and less in others; however, the tendency to possess and accumulate is in everyone. Many people keep diaries for years in which they record their thoughts and events. That is also accumulation. Possessiveness represents a negative, rajasic attitude. To balance that rajasic attitude and to free the mind from attachments and associations, an attitude or act different from the usual one is adopted. Instead of accumulation, the act or idea becomes one of giving and sharing.

In India, giving is a very ancient tradition from the vedic era. At one point of time, everybody used to give. If a stranger came during mealtime, he would be invited to share the food, even if it was only two dry rotis. This is also the tradition in the Christian teachings. A beggar would not be turned away from the door empty-handed. He could collect all that he required for the day by going to only three houses, and not have to sit by the roadside all day as is the case today.

In the vedic culture, the act of giving and sharing was mandatory. You had to share your income with those without a source of income. Ten percent of what you earned did not belong to you and it was compulsory to set it aside for those who had nothing. Even today, the tradition is that you set aside a percentage of your money to help others. The income tax laws state that five percent of your profit has to be used for charitable or religious work. It applies to every industry and factory, even to the ashram, yet whether or not people do it is up to them. We always look after our own pleasure and comfort, rather than caring for the have-nots, who comprise the majority in society. However, as Sri

Swami Satyananda has said, “How long can you sit in your air-conditioned room when there is fire raging outside? Eventually the fire will engulf you as well.” By reintroducing the vedic culture, in the course of time, poverty can be eradicated.

People who come to the ashram contribute to it and the ashram returns that contribution in one form or another. It is part of the natural evolution of the ashram. In the beginning we did not give gifts because we were in need. The ashram was being built and all the finances and resources were required, but now we have everything, so we want to return to people what they have given us in their faith and sincerity. One basic principle we have always followed is that whatever you give is not for us but is held in trust. You give because of a feeling, yet we are only the postman. This is why there are no luxuries in the ashram.

Prasad, bheth, akshat and daan are different terms used for the act of giving. *Daan* means charity. Any giving by a householder is known as daan. *Prasad* means an offering of goodwill. Any giving that happens in an ashram or in a temple is known as prasad. This offering or present carries good wishes for your health, happiness, prosperity and peace.

Bheth means gift. It is given to people, not for their pleasure or enjoyment, but because of their need. One year in Rikhia, we gave a complete set of kitchen utensils to each family for cooking, storing, drinking and serving. This is known as bheth, a gift to alleviate suffering, to fulfil a need.

Akshat means a never-ending gift. It refers to grains, and it is used more in relation to yajna, as in the yajna everything is offered to Devi, the Universal Mother. What you offer to Devi and then take back is akshat, a never-ending gift, a continuous stream, just like a flowing river. What you are being given back is a continuous flow of the grace of God. Therefore, what you receive during the yajna is akshat, as they are symbolic items. A shawl for the males, a sari for the females, a kilo of rice, a kilo of wheat, one hundred grams of barley, different yantras or images and deepaks were

common akshat gifts given during the Rajasooya yajna. These gifts of clothes, grains and devotional items will always remind you that divine grace is flowing to you continuously. That sentiment and feeling will stay with you through the gift of akshat. This is the Indian tradition and at every opportunity, on every auspicious day, daan, bheta, prasada and akshat are given.

—2 January 2005

Who is Shiva?

Lord Shiva is the destroyer, the transformer, the catalyst for change. In creation, he is part of the Hindu trinity in which Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver and Shiva is the transmuter. Shiva is also the first or original yogi. He is considered to be the greatest of all the gods, the emperor, yet he lives not in heaven but in the cremation ground where material life is destroyed and a new journey begins.

Shiva's body is a composition of different symbols. Imagine him as a yogi with matted hair. On his head, the Ganga emerges as a stream, representing the fountain of purity, youth and eternal life. He is the only god who has three eyes. When his two eyes see the world of duality, his third eye remains closed. The eye of unity only opens when the eyes of duality are closed, at which time everything dissolves in one single identity. That is why the opening of the third eye is also seen as the bringer of death and destruction to duality.

At vishuddhi chakra, in his throat, he retains poison. This has turned his throat blue, so he is called *Nilakantha*, blue-throated. To save creation, Shiva drank poison churned from the ocean of milk by the gods who were seeking the nectar of immortality, retaining it in his throat where it could not harm him. What does this mean? In kundalini yoga, bindu is the seat of nectar. When khechari mudra is performed, bindu is stimulated. If the drop of nectar goes down the throat into the stomach, manipura converts it into poison, but if the

drop remains in the throat, it stays as nectar. Therefore, yogis try to perfect khechari mudra.

Shiva's body is smeared with ashes. Ash is what remains after all the elements or *tattwas* are burned and fused into one. The body has five elements: matter, water, fire, air and space, yet when the body burns, everything becomes one tattwa: ash. Matter represents existence. Ash represents non-existence. Symbolically, ash represents the essence of birth and death.

While the other gods live in beautiful palaces in heaven, Shiva lives in an absolutely desolate area: the plateau of Tibet and the mountain of Kailash. While the other gods wear beautiful clothes and ornaments, he wears a tiger skin, which symbolically represents *prana shakti* or energy. As ornaments around his neck, arms and waist, Shiva has snakes, which represent awakened kundalini shakti.

Shiva is considered to be the *ishta devata*, symbol or hero of sannyasins due to his ability to maintain perfect spiritual balance. It is no easy task for him to keep the balance in his personal life, nor is it simple to differentiate between the two eyes of duality and the third eye of unity, because creation and destruction are happening at the same time. In the Indian tradition, Shiva is the symbol of the equipoised person. He is a yogi who always finds balance in life, although he does not live in the peaceful environment that we all crave. He has the habit of accumulating people and animals that are always after each other's blood. If you have ghosts, demons, ghouls and spirits as your assistants, how can there be peace?

Shiva also has a wife, Parvati, and two sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya. Each member of his family has an animal for a vehicle. Shiva's favourite mode of transport is a bull, Shakti has a tiger, Ganesha has a rat and Kartikeya, a peacock. The ornaments on Shiva's body are snakes. Imagine the jugglery Shiva has to perform to maintain order in his home. The bull is always in fear of the tiger, the peacock is always watching the snakes, the snakes are always watching the rat. In this household of tension and frustration, Shiva

represents the perfect being who maintains equilibrium in every situation.

Shiva, the yogi, was once a real man, not a mythological person or part of the religious trinity. He lived an incredible wild life in the mountains, not tied by any social conditions. Shiva represents yoga, as in duality, conflict and confusion, he remains stable in his identity and at peace. Sri Swamiji has said, "There is no peace in the Himalayas and there is no noise in the world; it is in our own mind. If the chattering of the mind continues, even in the remotest corner of the Himalayas you will not find peace, yet if the mental chattering has been stilled, you will find absolute silence even in the middle of the market." Shiva represents this *purushartha* or attainment.

Shiva means 'the auspicious one', 'the benevolent one'. He always wants what is right and appropriate for creation. It is we who misuse the potential and facilities given to us. Instead of being creative and constructive, we condition ourselves. Instead of being open and receptive, we close ourselves in with our own thoughts, beliefs and ideas. Instead of trying to learn from and understand another's viewpoint, we overemphasize our own views. Instead of learning to flow with life, we find happiness and strength in struggling, in doing the opposite to what we should do.

The ability to know and to do what is appropriate and auspicious is the power of Shiva. Once an invocation is made to that auspicious nature and the reins of life handed over to that force, life takes on a different meaning. Worship of Shiva, the spirit that is in everybody, is a connection of your mind with your inner benevolent and auspicious self. Some people call it *atma*, spirit, some call it *jivatma*, individual spirit, yet according to kundalini yoga, it is Shiva, the consciousness which resides in sahasrara chakra. As part of that eternal consciousness or *chit*, it is also eternal truth, *sat*. As it is eternal truth and consciousness, seeking to uplift everyone and bestow freedom from bondage, it is also *ananda*, bliss or auspiciousness.

—11 January 2005

P-U-S-H

Once upon a time there lived a man in a tranquil little village. It was a time when not many people lived on the planet, when human beings could commune with God, and demons and God lived together. Every morning people would go to their farms and every evening return to a warm house. Life was very contented and happy.

One day, God appeared in front of the man and said, "See that huge rock in the field. Go and push it." The man looked at the rock and thought, "Well, for the first time in the history of humanity God has asked a human being to do something." From then on, every morning he would get up, perform his morning asana, pranayama and shatkarmas, have his breakfast, go to the rock and start pushing.

After many years the man became a bit tired of going through the same routine day after day. This was the moment the devil had been waiting for. The devil entered the man's head and said, "Look, you have been pushing this rock for many years now. What have you achieved? It has not moved at all, not even half an inch. What is the use of doing something you can never accomplish?" The man thought, "The devil is right. I have spent twenty years of my life pushing that rock. It has not moved an inch!" So he said, "No more!" and sat down. He stopped doing his morning asana, pranayama and shatkarmas.

When God returned, he saw that the man had not pushed the rock for many months. When he asked why, the man said, "This is a futile exercise. I have pushed the rock for twenty years and nothing has happened. The rock is still here! Nothing has moved. Not even an inch. I am only wasting my time. Knowing that it is an impossible feat, I have stopped making the effort."

God looked at the man, smiled and said, "I asked you to *push* the rock. I did not ask you to move the rock; that was your own idea. My instruction was clear. As far as moving the rock is concerned, I can do it with a click of my fingers. The entire rock can become dust before you can even say

my name. I asked you to push the rock and that is what you should have done.”

What should our perspective and attitude be in life? We are asked to push something and we expect it to move. Our focus and awareness is on moving, not on pushing. After every tiny bit of effort we put into pushing, we look down to see whether we are moving forward or not. Therefore, whenever you encounter an obstacle, push. ‘Push’ means Pray Until Something Happens!

—19 January 2005

What is quantum healing?

If you look at the birth of different culture groups and civilizations, you will find that each culture and civilization focused on the development of a specific belief, religious, ritual and worship system, and these became their identity. Whether it is the Greek civilization, the Roman civilization, the Anglo-Saxon civilization, the Nordic group, the Asian groups, the Chinese, Japanese, Indian, or African: each has a specific identity. These identities are further grouped under two categories: esoteric and exoteric. Esoteric means ideas, thoughts, beliefs: the understanding of the human mind, nature, personality, spirit. It refers to the transcendental, the non-material. Exoteric means the external science. Modern civilizations emerged from these two groups, which were further classified by thinkers as eastern and western.

The civilization that developed exoterically, focused on materialism. It developed ideas about the world, the environment in which it lived, and how to live by using what was available in a positive way. It identified with matter, with the external use of matter to make life more congenial and comfortable. The other group identified not with matter, but with spirit. It identified not with nature in order to use what was available, but to live according to the precepts of nature. This happened largely in Asia, where they developed a culture that emphasized a form of belief

and system of living that was intended to uplift the human being to great heights. There are yogis in the Himalayas, Tibet, China, Asia, Sufi saints, Islamic teachers and masters, even Christian teachers and masters who have attained *siddhis*, psychic powers, only through meditation. Only by closing their eyes and going within they can achieve pranic healing.

The exoteric cultures have absolute ignorance of these processes, as their focus is different. Not better or worse, simply different. However, in the course of time, when the materialistic civilization started to think of something beyond matter, in the realm of the spirit, then in order to understand it, they created the subject of quantum physics.

Quantum physics or quantum healing is an attempt to understand what the eastern traditions have been talking about since millennia: about prana shakti, consciousness, the possibilities of extra-sensorial expressions, liberation from the bondage of the senses. These terms were coined to understand the metaphysical and mystical aspects of eastern teachings.

In fact, for a yogi, for a person entrenched in yoga, who has gone through that experience of extrasensorial achievement, quantum physics or quantum healing have no meaning. It is like a person studying history or geology in university looking at the textbook of the primary school standard.

In our tradition, mantras have been used to cure illness and diseases. You are chanting the mantra here, and a person is being cured over there. People have witnessed these things. Is that a miracle? No. It is not material science either. It is metaphysical science. How does it work? To understand this process, the terms quantum healing and quantum physics were brought in. These are only words coined to somehow understand something that was unknown to a certain group a certain number of years ago.

—29 April 2005

How can we use yoga to survive in the outside world?

Before trying to understand how to apply yoga commercially, we have to understand the limitations or situations that yoga is facing today, how different people are utilizing this need to project yoga in society, and what your role in it can be. Yoga has become a hot word, especially in the last two or three years in India. Today, people go for yoga lessons in their thousands, yet they really don't know what yoga is. They do not know why they are practising a particular asana or pranayama. They seem to be doing it purely for physical development, not in terms of physique, but as a way to deal with the limitations that their social life has placed upon them.

Who are these people practising yoga? They are the normal mixed bag of society, from different trades, professions, social statuses, economic groups, traditions and religions. What is their situation in life? They are struggling on two fronts: physical and economic. The word 'physical' here is intended to mean the limits that society has placed upon a human body and movement. What is the ratio between movement and remaining static during an entire day for an average person? Whether in the car, sitting on a chair in the office, or lounging in the living room at home, you are static much of the time. Minimum time is actually spent in movement. At home you move from one room to another, or if there is a garden, maybe ten steps outside to pick flowers or water some plants, or perhaps half an hour of joy-walking in the morning or evening. Those who feel the need to exercise more go to the gym, sweat a bit, and come back home.

This condition is not appropriate for the physical body, as the health of the body depends on movement and regular exercise of the body's organs. From one hundred percent movement we have come down to about five percent. Life has become easy in the metropolises, and not much physical effort is required to achieve anything. As a result, a condition has been created in the physical body, which over a period

of time sets in genetically. Subsequent generations become weak and therefore experience disease and imbalance, which causes further physical deterioration.

The second front an average person is struggling on is financial. The world revolves around money today, and you have to make sure that you have an adequate income to meet all your needs and family demands. This drive leads to psychological stress, mental and emotional debility.

These people are not coming to yoga for spiritual illumination, but to find physical and mental health. They are not concerned with creativity, changing their personality or values. They just want a fit body and a slightly better mind; that is all. Since they are not coming for the real purpose of yoga, there is no need to preach yogic philosophy to them, and a yoga teacher has to recognize this. Without this ability, you are not a yoga teacher, no matter how many degrees and certificates you acquire.

Due to the increased attraction to yoga, many people see yoga as a means of livelihood. It is a craze, and many yoga teachers are not concerned with whether they are teaching yoga correctly; they are solely concerned with financial gains. This is a dangerous trend. In the course of time, a situation will arise where the negative results of such yoga teaching will be evident, and there will be a decline in the demand for yoga.

If you want to become a sincere yoga teacher, your responsibility is to work to bring the right approach, understanding and practice to people. Many yoga teachers around today are teaching push and pull yoga, not *sthiram*, steady, and *sukham*, comfortable, yoga. Different brand names like 'power yoga', 'kinetic yoga', and so on, have come up, yet they do not have an understanding of the yogic system, let alone the yogic tradition. Therefore, if you want to work as a yoga teacher, the first commitment you have to make is to be sincere to yoga. Otherwise, you can teach, but you will not be a representative of yoga, nor someone who understands yoga. As a yoga teacher, you have to practise

living yoga. Live your day with a yogic attitude, and be the witness, the observer, the *drashta*, of yourself.

Another factor to be understood is that in today's society, an organization has the power, not the individual. An organization can evolve if it has proper guidelines, aims and objectives. Therefore, if you can associate yourself with an organization, or create one, you should do it. Don't dream too big or you will get lost in your imagination and fantasies, and miss the existing opportunities. If you want to be a yogi, remember this point: do not miss the opportunities existing in the present. We make plans, we desire to do many things, yet we get so carried away by our little achievements or problems that the aim becomes the means and the means become the end. If you are part of an organization or cultivating your own, you must also have training in administrative skills.

The other point to remember is: don't get caught up in the accolades you receive. You may wonder what to do when people look at you as a spiritual, illumined or elevated person when you are only a student of yoga. Remember that you are identifying with your ego at that time. If someone praises you, will you believe that, or say, "I know what I am; it is not your opinion that is important to me but my understanding of myself." If you think you are spiritually inclined, but are elated by praise or depressed by abuse, where is the balance that should be the result of your practice? Therefore, you have to guard against situations, words and ideas that disturb your peace of mind.

Yoga teachers should also understand anatomy and physiology, and some psychology. They should know about pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. They should have the ability to differentiate between, for example, an ambition and a samskara; to look back at a chain of events and come to a conclusion. They should have knowledge of *svabhava* or individual nature, of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga. This much is enough. You do not need to know kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. Ninety percent of the

social demands can be fulfilled with knowledge of physiology, anatomy, psychology, hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, dhyana yoga and bhakti yoga.

—10 May 2005

How does one find the right duty or the will of God in spite of social, political and family conflicts?

If we are to live according to the will of God, then first of all our attitudes need to change. Without that effort, one cannot live according to the will of God. The change takes place in the ideology of the mind. We think, ‘I am the doer’ – *Aham karta*, and that we can do things to influence our situation, environment and society. We have inflated ideas about ourselves, especially when we are young and hot-blooded. In everyday situations, we become the actors identifying with the act. When we identify with the act, we experience every thought, emotion and feeling that appears in that act. “I am the doer, I am the enjoyer” – *Aham karta, aham bhokta*. If we think we can set things right, we are following the dictates of our mind, not God.

In order to recognize the will of God, this attitude has to change to *Naham karta* – “I am not the doer,” *Naham bhokta* – “I am not the enjoyer.” It is said, “Make me an instrument of Thy will.” Become an instrument so that the divine will can then take over your life. To become that instrument, we have to work hard. Radha once asked Krishna, “Why do you like the flute so much?” Krishna replied, “I like the flute because it is empty, and when the flute is empty I can create any sound from it.” If there are obstructions inside the flute, the sound will not come. In order to become the conveyor of God’s will, the attitude of ‘I am the doer, I am the performer, I am the enjoyer’ has to change. We have to become empty. The character, lifestyle, attitude, belief and strength of those who have followed that will is defined by this change of attitude: letting go of the individual identity and merging with the cosmic identity. However, in the

absence of the ability to let go of the idea of identity, we can imbibe and follow the teachings of those who have followed the divine will. The basis of any such teaching is finding what is appropriate in life.

True religious or spiritual teachings, without any social impositions, give us the understanding of appropriate behaviour, function, performance and thought patterns that uplift us, unite us with other people and bring out the human qualities in us. Being without social impositions means connecting with the true spiritual component. The problem arises when different social conditions begin to influence our spiritual ideas.

We are all subject to social conditionings. The software that our mind contains and we are born with is not made by us, but by the higher intelligence. Throughout our life, we function according to the programming of that software. The commands of the software are known as *chitta vrittis*. We are living that programming, and cannot change it unless we become a programmer ourselves and know the program language. Therefore, what do we do? We just try to understand our life by incorporating the good and the beautiful that life has to offer. When we are able to do this, we are adhering to the path of dharma. Begin by putting into your life components of goodness, and an illuminated attitude and behaviour.

—15 October 2005

Why is there so much evil in the world despite a loving and compassionate God?

In order to appreciate goodness, beauty and light, you need to experience ugliness, pain and darkness. If you are not exposed to ugliness, there is no appreciation of beauty. If you are not exposed to darkness, there is no appreciation of light. If you are not exposed to evil, there is no craving or aspiration to achieve goodness in life. Good and bad are two sides of the same coin, like positive and negative, Shiva and

Shakti. What is termed as good or bad by you, is only your perception. What you call good is what you are comfortable with, and what you call bad is what you are uncomfortable with. You have developed this idea of good and bad, but in cosmic terms, nothing is good or bad. It is one sequence leading to another, one event leading to another. The earth keeps on turning, and as it turns there is light and there is darkness. You call light 'good' and darkness 'bad', which is only your interpretation.

Life is a challenge because life is tamasic. Every reaction of an individual is tamasic. If somebody gets a few extra chocolates, you are jealous. If somebody is elevated to a higher position than you, again competitiveness, the tamasic nature, comes to surface. Life by its very laws is tamasic, not sattwic. We are not using the terms 'evil' and 'virtuous', we are saying 'tamasic' and 'sattwic'. Good and bad are English terms, but in relation to life, in yoga we call the good *sattwic*: in which there is awareness, illumination, wisdom, harmony, balance. The evil is called *tamasic*: in which lies the negative, the detrimental, the restrictive, the binding, the dark. Life is tamasic. Every reaction, thought, behaviour and attitude is selfish. It is an effort to become selfless. Evil and bad are only conditionings that we experience, and that conditioning is known as *tamas*. The good, the virtuous, is being free, free of that conditioning, and establishing oneself in *sattwa*.

However, the *sattwic* and the *tamasic* have to bring about a balance. Too much of good is also not good. If you have too much of a good thing, it becomes bad eventually. Good and bad only create a balance. It is always fifty percent good, fifty percent bad. Fifty percent night, fifty percent day. There is always a perfect division. Even in your life, if you think you have more moments of pain and less of joy, you would be wrong. Yes, you may have more moments at the horizontal scale of pain, but the moments of joy take the scale up vertically. You receive joy and pain in exact proportion even if they differ time-wise and length-wise. Your suffering could last a month, and joy a week, but the peak of each will be the

same. They are both there so we can appreciate each, and learn, decide and have the wisdom to know where to connect.

—15 October 2005

Why is the world the way it is? What is the purpose of existence and what is our role in it?

What is the role of a railway station? If you are there a few hours early, what will you do? You will go to the waiting room, drink tea, eat peanuts. Just as the role of a railway station is to allow passengers to embark and disembark, and move on, in the same way, the purpose of existence is evolution.

Evolution is the continuity of the development of human consciousness. Once this life is over, evolution continues in another life. When you go to school, you continue in the same class until you pass, and then you move on to the next class. The same thing applies here; that is the law of karma. You have to understand this carefully.

The Indian philosophies like Samkhya, Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, tantra and yoga have said that the consciousness evolves continuously, and during this process of evolution, we go through different levels of existence or *yonis*. There are believed to be eighty-four lakh yonis: those many levels of existence. Or you can even say, different levels of consciousness becoming conscious of itself.

If you look at the entire range in creation, right from a single-cell amoeba, insects, reptiles, birds, to human beings, you will find that there is one component, consciousness, which is continuing in all of them. Each species comes to the optimum expression of that consciousness once in the course of its evolution. Take dogs, for example. There are dogs that are scared and there are dogs that open themselves to you, and you feel attracted to them. Similarly, there are different ranges of human expression and perception. In all species, there are different ranges of understanding and behaviour, consciousness, perception and interaction levels. The body

dies, the dog dies, but something of that dog continues into the next. It can become a human being! One doesn't know as one does not know what will trigger off the awakening in consciousness.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa awakened the consciousness of Swami Vivekananda by placing a hand on his head. There is the story of Sant Gyaneshwar, who made a buffalo chant the Vedas four hundred years ago by putting a hand on its head. Perhaps in its next life, this enlightened buffalo became an intellectual, an Einstein! This is the theory of evolution.

From the yogic perspective, evolution is defined on three levels: *pashu* or animal evolution, *manushya* or human evolution, and *deva* or divine evolution.

At the earth level, there are seven stages, seven chakras. These seven chakras indicate seven levels of awakening of consciousness. The topmost centre for an animal is mooladhara and for a human being, sahasrara. Some people are in mooladhara, some in swadhisthana, some in manipura, some in anahata, some in vishuddhi, some in ajna. Then there are siddhas who come to the sahasrara level. They become as good as God!

—25 October 2005

Why is not to be born again considered superior to being born again in different lives? Can a human being be born again as a lower life form?

Thinkers of the past have said that nothing is constant or fixed; the human mind, life, nature, everything is constantly evolving. The world has been seen as a place where one comes to perfect the skills that one is given for coming down to this level of existence. After perfecting that level of existence, the spirit simply moves on to the next level, the next dimension. There is no stagnation.

There are people who believe that one does not come back to this plane of existence after having passed this class, just as you don't go back to primary class after having passed

it. This is the theory of no return. If one has attained God-realization, which is the aim of life, what is there to return for? Even if you return, how many will you be able to help in one lifetime? Are you going to be able to influence the destiny of others, which is created by God? If you think you can change the destiny of humanity, then you must be as powerful as God.

The existence in this dimension has been seen as a transitory stage in the process of evolution. The concept of moksha as spoken of by sages of the past, nirvana as spoken of by Buddha, samadhi, mukti, all these represent perfection in this material plane. After having attained this perfection, one simply moves on to another plane, and there is no return.

However, there are people who do decide to return again and again, like Sri Swamiji. He says, "I only have one request to God. I want to come back as quickly as possible in a new body to help others overcome their suffering. After the entire humanity has passed on to a new level of existence, I wish to be the last one to leave this planet, after having ensured that I have wiped away the tears of suffering from every face." Siddhas do control their death and birth, and a sankalpa such as that of Sri Swamiji will actualize. He will come back. Maybe the day after his departure from this body, he will be born again. Siddhas such as him can guide their spirits to carry out a definite mission and serve a purpose in the divine scheme of things. At the level at which we exist, this question is irrelevant. We are not siddhas who can decide that we wish to return, it is only a fantasy for us. Nor are we so evolved that we can say we are ready to take the next step. We are not able to control our reactions, thoughts and personal identifications, so how can we even think of creating a situation where the force of the spirit is manifest? Therefore, our purpose should be perfection in life. Forget about enlightenment and moksha, think about excellence and creativity, and achieve enlightenment through excellence and creativity.

—26 October 2005

Swamiji, I have held on to this question for some time: who are you? You are a disciple of Swami Satyananda and you came because of a mission and you are teaching us . . .

I am a sannyasin. That is what I am. A sannyasin, just like anyone else, has a hero. I have a hero too. The first in line is Swami Sivananda, my grandfather guru. When I look at his life, I find that it has been one hundred percent selfless. When I look at his teachings, when I try to understand his teachings, the only thing I come across is: become selfless. That has to become the aim in life. Whatever you do must have a purpose by which you can help other people. Swami Sivananda would renounce his meditation to physically, medically help people who were suffering. If he was sitting for meditation and a sick person arrived, he would come out of meditation, give him the right medicine, and once he was satisfied with the treatment, he would go back to his sadhana. The priority in his life was helping other people. He led a very simple, yet a very high life.

When I look at the character of Swami Sivananda, I am reminded of a story. There was an ascetic who performed many years of austerity with the purpose of realizing God. Pleased with his efforts, God appeared before him and said, "I am pleased with you. You can ask for any boon, it will be granted." The ascetic, with due humility and reverence said, "The purpose of my effort was to have your glimpse, receive your grace, see you, know you, realize you. Now that I have realized you, nothing else remains in my life. I have no desires. Thank you very much for your offer of the boon, but I have nothing to ask." God said, "Look, I have said I am going to grant you a boon. I am bound by what I have said. Therefore, you have to ask for something." The ascetic said, "No, I'm not going to ask for anything. The only thing I wanted was to have your glimpse, that's it. The purpose is fulfilled, so please go away." God said, "You know, you are the first person to speak to me like this." The ascetic said, "I hope not the last. I hope many more will come after me who will say this to you." Saying this, he turned his back to God

and started to walk away. God looked at the receding figure, and said, "Okay, you are going to get a boon; not you, but your shadow." He blessed the shadow with the gift of healing. The ascetic was unaware of the boon, and wherever he went, unknown to him, his shadow continued to work miracle after miracle. The shadow fell on the dead stump of a tree, and it became green and laden with flowers and fruit. It fell on a sick person, and he was healed. It fell on a blind person, and his sight was restored.

This is the character I find in Swami Sivananda's life. He did his spiritual penance, not for enlightenment or moksha. That was what he had to do, and in doing that he maintained the vision that life is God's gift and it has to be nurtured at all levels: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, psychic. His teachings were directed to this end, and have worked wonders throughout the world. He had a following of thousands, yet he was true to his path and vision, and walked alone all his life. Can I be like him, even ten percent? That's a question I pose to myself. I know I can't be one hundred percent like him, but even ten percent, even one percent? Can I overcome my limitations to become as selfless as that? Can I live his teachings?

The second idol is my own guru, Swami Satyananda. In his life, I have seen zeal, determination, drive, focus, one-pointedness and clarity. These are the qualities with which he has walked his spiritual path. He never stopped for anyone. He has walked his own pace. People have cried and shouted to him to slow him down and walk with them, but no, he was not inspired to this path because of anybody. He was inspired to this path because of his guru, not because of his disciples, and he remained true to his path. He is my second hero. Can I remain true to my path and not allow other people to pull and strangle me with their visions and demands? Can I walk at my own pace without having to stop for others? Ultimately, I will have to, for my motivation for coming to this path was not the followers who would come after me, but to follow the path trodden by the heroes of my life, to the best of my ability.

Look at the history of Swami Sivananda's mission and of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Satyananda's mission. What has been the contribution of their effort from the time they started? Has anything ever been taken by them personally? No. Things have only been given and given. With this kind of one-pointedness, one definitely fulfils one's destiny. The seed has to break the shell in order to sprout. An identity has to be lost, an effort has to be made, and that is the direction I have to walk in. I am walking, and I will continue.

I have a lot of ground to cover. Just an ordinary person I am, born in an ordinary family, a very ordinary soul. No mission, just determination, because everything is predetermined in life. The heartbeats, breath, death, everything is predetermined. If I have to become something, nothing can stop that. If I have to remain what I am, I will continue. However, if change comes, nothing can stop that as everything is predetermined. How can there be a mission if everything is predetermined? The destiny of a flower is to open one day. The destiny of a fruit is to separate itself from the tree one day. The destiny of water flowing in the river is to again become a drop in a cloud one day. Yes, there is destiny, but nobody allows their destiny to unfold. We all hang on to what we can identify with.

When Sri Swamiji left Rishikesh, he did not look back. When he left this ashram in Munger in 1988, he did not look back. He says, "When I leave even Rikhia, I will not look back." Everything that he has said has always inspired and guided me to attain betterment and excellence in life. I can understand the statement, "Many come, few are chosen, few attain. Out of the few who attain, few become." Therefore, at present, I am only a wanderer on the path.

—29 October 2005

What is the role of yoga nidra?

Yoga nidra is not only a technique of relaxation, or stress management, or for those who suffer from insomnia. If we

look seriously at yoga nidra, we will find that it can play an important role in accessing the dormant areas of the unconscious mind. When there is a need, the information can come to the surface. There is a saying that there is nothing new under the sun. In the same way, there is nothing new under the layers of consciousness. For example, people had always seen apples falling from trees, but nobody thought, 'Why do they fall down?' Only Newton did, and he came up with the theory of gravity. That seed is in each one of us, yet Newton was able to access that information, which started a trend of reflection and analysis that led him to discover the law of gravity. Those people in whom the seed of information sprouts are known as geniuses.

Sri Swamiji has told us that his interest in yoga nidra was aroused by an incident when he was living with his guru in Rishikesh. His duty was to watch over a Sanskrit school where children were learning to chant the Vedas, which required him to stay awake all night. He would fall into a deep sleep at 3 am and wake up at 6 am. While he was asleep, the boys would be chanting, and although he never heard them, it was registered in his subtle body. Sometime later, when he heard the boys chanting at a function, it sounded familiar, although he was sure he had never heard it or read it. That was the birth of yoga nidra. Sri Swamiji realized that sleep was not a state of total unconsciousness, that a form of awareness remained awake and alert to outer situations, and that this state could be utilized by training the mind.

In 1966, ten years later, I was his first guinea pig. I received all my learning in the state of yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is a technique that develops a particular quality of mind, which I call 'mind-sight' or 'mind-vision'. If done in the right manner, it can open the door of creativity, and there is no limit to it. Therefore, we have to look at yoga nidra from a different perspective, not only as a technique of relaxation or sleep, but as a technique that can enhance one's creative ability if done in the right manner and at the right time.

The right time to practise yoga nidra for creativity is at a young age when the intellect is not yet developed and consciousness is sensitive to receiving information from its own sources. Yoga says that the education we receive before we go to school remains with us throughout our life. After we go to school, the focus is on the intellect and sequential learning, not spontaneous learning. Spontaneous learning stays with us throughout our life; whatever impression is planted in the subconscious mind will grow and enrich one's life. Sequential learning can be forgotten after some time, as it does not leave an impression on our consciousness; rather, it becomes an input into the conditioned, sensorial mind, buddhi. Nevertheless, if you begin the practice of yoga nidra now to sensitize your consciousness, changes can happen.

—8 November 2005

Can you tell us about Sivananda Math?

Sivananda Math was founded by Swami Satyananda in 1984. After being active in Munger for eleven years, in 1995 it started activities in the Deoghar region, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas in India. Gradually, changes have occurred. Today, Sivananda Math looks after the needs of about fifty villages and 27,000 families in the region, from clothing, bedding and grain, to education of the children, medical care and employment. Now, everybody has a source of income. When people have nothing, crime increases, whereas now that everyone has something to look forward to, there is no crime. Prosperity has come in its place.

Sivananda Math is not an organization that does only one kind of work. Many different projects have evolved. We have not only built homes for the homeless, but also given agricultural aid, tools and technical education. Where only one crop grew every year, three crops are now produced each year. We have provided water, pumps and sprinkler systems so that farms can be irrigated within a ten-kilometre radius. When you visit Rikhia, you will have the opportunity

to participate in the work of Sivananda Math. This is an important experience in learning to cultivate compassion.

Our policy is not to give any aid directly to people, as we are not acting as a charity. Things have to be done in a systematic manner. If people beg for ten rupees, we tell them clearly that we are willing to spend 10,000 rupees if they are sick, but we will not give them ten rupees to waste. Sivananda Math is not a charity, but an organization based on the vision of Swami Sivananda. You have to respect that and erase from your mind the idea that it is charity work. We give everybody the same thing. The bundles each family receives contain everything they require. Therefore, the dignity of the vision has to be maintained, and not the haphazardness of charity.

One goes to Rikhia to become one with the vision of Swami Sivananda, to understand the culmination of spiritual life. The culmination of spiritual life is not realization. God-realization can be the aim of life for some people, but for the majority, God-realization is a very selfish attitude. Look at the different traditions. Christ did not need to sacrifice himself. He did not have to involve himself with the masses. There was no need for Buddha or St Francis of Assisi to be involved with the masses. However, all the enlightened beings have ultimately involved themselves and worked to uplift people. Only the selfish spiritual seekers have retired to the mountains and died unknown deaths. This is the reality that one has to recognize.

God-realization or self-realization is only a by-product of an expanded mind, expanded feelings or expanded connections with others. Our connections are not expanded. They are confined to those we consider our own. The suffering of a stranger does not affect us in the same manner as the suffering of a near and dear one, as there is no connection with a stranger. Therefore, spiritual life has to be looked at as it has been lived by those enlightened beings, the ones who have become an inspiration for society. It is this vision of spiritual life that we need to cultivate in order to understand the progression of yoga, spirituality, beauty,

compassion and love in life. Involving ourselves with all the best that God has given us and sharing all our best with others: that is the meaning of God-realization.

A candle burns in order to give light to others. If you follow the path of this spiritual vision, darkness goes away. Darkness may have existed in a cave for thousands of years, but one strike of a match can dispel that darkness in one second. Apply this same principle in your life. Complexes, problems, difficulties, ignorance or darkness are all there. The tamasic nature is there; however, the moment you are able to strike the match of sattwa, in one second the darkness that has existed for so long will disappear. That is the practical and dynamic teaching of Swami Satyananda in Rikhia.

— 8 November 2005

BHAKTI YOGA

Bhakti yoga is generally defined as the yoga of devotion, adoration and contemplation. This understanding has come about because of religious interference in people's spiritual lives, and it continues due to habit. Religions have defined their own methods of worship as devotion and their own methods of contemplation as the means to commune with God. Somewhere, the idea of worship and communion with God has overlapped with the concept of bhakti yoga. However, if you look at the classical texts and the scriptural references, *bhakti yoga* means, not devotion, but a process of personal, psychological, intellectual and emotional transformation, moving from a tamasic state of existence to a higher quality, a purer state of existence.

Sri Krishna spoke about bhakti yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*, five thousand years ago. What was the type of bhakti yoga propagated then? He said (12:13):

*Advaishtaa sarva bhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.*

One who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving (is dear to me).

To become a bhakta or a sattwic being, the first condition is to overcome the dual mentality. When you are able to see oneness in everything, when you are able to see the inner nature of all beings, that is the first attainment of bhakti yoga. The second and third attainments are friendliness and compassion for all. The fourth is overcoming the selfish nature, the arrogance and rigidity of the ego, and developing the selfless nature.

The twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the clearest definition of bhakti yoga that has ever been presented. It predates every religious, moral and ethical belief of the present-day traditions of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. This is the concept of bhakti yoga that has been ingrained in India and the yogic culture. We call worship *aradhana*, not bhakti yoga. We call mantra repetition and other practices *upasana*, not bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga is a process of inner transformation.

Ten thousand years ago, Sri Rama described nine forms of bhakti. The first form is keeping company with positive, pious, good people and shunning the company of those who are negative and a bad influence: *Prathama bhagati santanha kara sangaa* (*Ramacharitamanas*, 'Aranyakanda' 34:4). Rama also clarified the difference between a good and a bad person: *Bicchurata eka praana hari lehi, milata eka dukha daaruna dehi* (*Ramacharitamanas*, 'Balakanda' 4:2). The pious are those who 'take away your heart and mind upon separation'. It means there is so much identification and oneness with them that you feel, 'We are two bodies but with one mind and one spirit.' The crooked, by contrast, are those who bring suffering and pain, who can influence you and make you weak due to negative thinking, behaviour and attitudes. Is this devotion, or is it taking charge of

your life? Do you keep company with people who uplift and inspire you to reach greater heights, or do you enjoy the company of those who are critical and negative? What is experienced through the negative intellect is selfishness, not friendliness or compassion. Unless you can see the one spirit in everyone, you cannot fulfil the first conditions of bhakti. Therefore, you have to redefine your understanding of bhakti yoga.

Redefining bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga means to improve the quality of life, the behaviour and thinking patterns, to enhance the sattwic and creative abilities. Therefore, bhakti yoga is the yoga of inner transformation. It is not the yoga of chanting God's name in a foreign language, which is how many people who do not understand bhakti yoga define it. Bhakti is definitely not the yoga of devotion in the sense that we usually understand devotion. It is the yoga of sublimating the gross nature and attaining the harmonious sattwic nature.

If we want to discover and enlighten our own natures then, eventually, bhakti is the way, not jnana yoga, raja yoga or karma yoga. In hatha yoga you only require your body, in jnana yoga you only require your intellect, in karma yoga you require the senses and in raja yoga you require the mind. However, in bhakti yoga, the lifestyle, behaviour, thinking patterns, intellect, feelings, emotions and social performance are all involved. To perfect bhakti yoga, the lifestyle and the individual have to come together.

One plug, two sockets

Yoga has been defined as union, connection, coming together. Take the example of two sockets and one plug. One socket represents yoga; the other represents maya. The maya socket has the potential to separate and to create an illusion of reality in appearance. The yoga socket has the strength and power to bring back consciousness from the environment of illusion to the realization of its own nature.

Together, these two are known as *yogamaya*. *Yogamaya* is the cosmic force, energy or power, the Cosmic Mother.

We are the plug, all of us: you, me, everyone in the world. Inevitably, our plug is connected to the socket of *maya*, which is our present modern, material life and social mentality. Modern life is the life you are leading today, not the life you lived twenty or thirty years ago. The social mentality is becoming more and more dependent on technological marvels. Things are becoming smaller and more useful, and we are becoming dependent on those things.

Future generations will not know how our grandfathers lived. How did people live in 1923 when Swami Satyananda was born? How did people live one hundred and twenty years ago when Swami Sivananda was born? Did they have air-conditioners or central heating or vacuum cleaners or multistoreyed buildings or motorcars? There has been such a dramatic change in the natural lifestyle of humanity since the industrial revolution, and definitely since the present day technological revolution, that future generations will not know what struggle is.

The comforts and luxuries we are surrounded with as a result of technological and scientific achievements means that the creative manual struggle has gone from life. We have become weak physically and mentally, so much so that we all wear a label saying, 'Fragile: handle with care'. One emotional slap and we break. One physical slap and we break. We break very fast: during extremes, during personal and natural climatic changes.

The role of *hatha yoga* is to maintain a healthy body, yet the role of the body is limited. After a certain age natural changes make the body weak. If you practise *yoga*, even at eighty you may be able to outwalk, outrun and outclass other people of that age group; however, your body mass, stamina, energy and strength will have depleted. Decay of the cells begins from the moment of birth. From birth to death, the body passes through the stages of illness and old age. *Hatha yoga* is good to maintain physical health, yet its role is limited.

Separation before union

If our life is connected to the material socket of maya and we want to plug into yoga, first the plug has to come out of the maya socket. Therefore, *viyoga*, dissociation, takes place first, not yoga. The beginning of yoga is disconnection, moving away from the influence of maya. When you see this, you will understand raja yoga as well. The idea behind pratyahara, dharana and dhyana is to gradually work through the mental behaviours and expressions which you can feel, observe, experience, express and modify.

When raja yoga is said to be the yoga that deals with stilling the *vruttis*, the modifications and agitations of the mind, it means the plug that is in the socket of maya is being moved. As it is extracted, the mind goes through levels of dissociation. There is separation from the unnecessary sensual experiences, expressions and movement to a more balanced and wise behaviour. We move from more self-centred expectations to selfless performance. Raja yoga represents the yoga that allows you to extract yourself from the negative influences of the senses and sensual experiences so that your mind can be free.

Raja yoga plays an important role in separating the mind from the objects of its gross, attached, possessive associations, from its self-oriented expectations, from its need for self-gratification at the expense of other people, circumstances and situations. Raja yoga provides the ability to be the witness during the process of self-extraction, yet it has a limited role.

Shoonyata

In our approach, we need to be clear what our role and relationship with yoga is going to be. You can be a hatha yoga teacher all your life, turn and twist your body in a thousand different ways and be happy with your suppleness and flexibility. You can perform hatha yoga in front of other people or alone in your room and live to the age of eighty, ninety, maybe one hundred. However, in the whole scheme

of yoga, hatha yoga is living a contented life, knowing you can only write A, B, C, D, perhaps in many different ways, yet without the understanding of how to combine the letters into words.

You can be a raja yogi all your life, thinking that samadhi or enlightenment is the aim. However, the yogic tradition also speaks of another stage in between, which is *shoonyata*, voidness. It is like the neutral of a car. Neutral means an area where there is an absolute break between the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and reverse gears. Upon disconnecting from maya, when the plug is out and moving to the yoga socket, for that moment there is void, shoonyata. Many people confuse this point with the state of samadhi, and in this state they lose touch with reality. This is not a recent phenomenon. Buddha had to face it. He said that shoonyata is an absolute void, where you are free from suffering, birth, pain, happiness, everything. However, then you have to go towards light. You need to have a focus. You can't always be hanging in the middle of nowhere, without any support or direction; you have to go towards light.

Purpose of karma yoga

Karma yoga allows you to act appropriately, whether you are connected to the maya or the yoga socket. Karma yoga is important to both, because one lives the karma. As long as you have a body, you have to undergo the karma of the body. Every day you need to urinate, eat and drink, as that is the karma of the body. The karma of the mind is thinking, ambition and expectation, desiring, making a need of that desire and, when the need becomes strong, planning to attain it. The karma of the emotions is wanting to be liked, appreciated, loved, supported, needed and guided. You have to live these karmas all the time; you cannot avoid it. It is wrong to say that you can be free of your karmas by not being an active participant in life. Therefore, karma yoga is important in both the maya and the yoga or spiritual socket.

Bhakti in mundane life

It is the same with bhakti yoga. In the mundane socket, bhakti will lead you to develop the connection of your feelings, thoughts and ideas with what is divine and transcendental. I may think of Shiva, you may think of Christ, others of Krishna, or Devi, or Buddha, or Mahavira. Somebody may think of light, another of darkness. The connection with that idea, belief or philosophy will give the individual an inner support to survive the struggles of life. When everything else fails in life, the final resort is always God: 'Please help me. I have no one.' From that feeling we derive strength, courage and peace. Therefore, bhakti yoga in mundane life is identification with the object of our contemplation.

It is possibly this aspect of bhakti that is confused with worship. Everybody is free to worship in their own way, whether by giving flowers, or water, or light, kneeling, prostrating or standing. Whatever the outer expression may be, the inner need is to experience identification and connection with that object, symbol or idea that gives us strength when we most need it. That is bhakti yoga when we are plugged into the mundane maya socket.

Bhakti in spiritual life

To change and transform the dualities of our mind, emotions and lifestyle, we plug into the socket of yoga. When we have left the socket of maya and our new life plug is in the socket of yoga, then bhakti yoga becomes the real yoga in all respects. As long as we are connected to the socket of maya, the senses, the body, the mind, the conditioning, samskaras, ideologies and cultural inputs are all there.

When we connect to the spiritual socket, bhakti yoga has a different expression. We can see this in the teachings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. In Ganga Darshan and Jyoti Mandir there are no pictures of gods and goddesses, only the *jyoti*, light. While we belong to a Shaiva sannyasa tradition, there are no external forms of Shiva, as

we believe that bhakti yoga is the yoga of transformation, not devotion and adoration.

If the modern lifestyle of this civilization is the material lifestyle from which you have disconnected, what kind of lifestyle will you live now? Once your life plug is connected to the socket of yoga, it will have to be a yogic lifestyle, not the common modern lifestyle. It will have to be a yogic lifestyle as you are connected to the yogic socket. Your new lifestyle will still have to be lived through action, in thought, in behaviour, in the expressions of the senses and the mental and emotional faculties.

In the yogic socket one develops a unified vision, so there is an automatic dissociation from and rejection of what is negative and detrimental to the development of your creative abilities. If a plate of freshly-made sweet kheer and a plate of one-month old kheer are placed in front of you, you will automatically choose the freshly-made one and reject what is detrimental without having to think about it. Many people worry about what they will need to leave or renounce, but it happens in a spontaneous, natural way. Therefore, the first step of spiritual bhakti yoga, as presented by Sri Rama 10,000 years ago and Sri Krishna 5,000 years ago, is keeping the company of the pious and avoiding the crooked.

Transformation through yogic lifestyle

In modern times, we have the examples of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, who say that when a person is sick, God in that person is sick. When a person is hungry, God in that person is hungry. When a person is happy, God in that person is happy. What does this mean? Vedanta says that there is one sun, yet the reflection of the sun on different lakes will be different. In the same manner, God is one, yet the reflection of God in each being is different. In ten people there will be ten different reflections of the same great spirit.

In bhakti yoga you develop the ability to see the existence of that spirit in everyone. When you look at a person, you

can see either beauty or ugliness, perhaps not just physically; one person may have a gentle, peaceful, vibrant, attractive nature and another may seem disturbed and dissipated, not centred or balanced. However, when you are able to see the spark of divinity in each one, you no longer focus on the body, colour, age, gender, mind, culture or religion. If you are identifying these different items then you are back in the worldly socket. In the yoga or spiritual socket, what is perceived is the spark of the divine spirit.

In the *Ramacharitamanas*, there is a beautiful passage describing Rama's entry into the hall where all the kings were sitting. Everyone looked at Rama through different eyes and perceived him differently. Mothers saw him as a baby, kings as their emperor, demons as their destroyer, the youth of the kingdom as their companion and friend, the yogis as the epitome of peace, joy and luminosity, young girls as their husband and lover. Each person had a different perception of Rama. With God also there are different perceptions, not one. You can experience God in the form of peace in each being. You can experience God in each in the form of a *jyoti* or self-luminous flame. You can see the quality of Christ in each person. You can see the quality of Devi in each one and connect with that. It is a living experience. This is the symptom of a *siddha*, a person who lives the yogic lifestyle.

Siddha means 'perfect one'. What is perfection? What is the idea of perfection in relation to a human being? Is a baby perfect? Is a grown-up perfect? When is man a perfect being? Perfection means that the fullness of each moment is lived to its optimum capacity, and one can live that every moment. That is the idea behind the yogic lifestyle: living with awareness, with understanding, with our positive qualities interacting in the whole process of evolution and development. This first step to *bhakti* yoga brings together the ideas of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda.

Yogamaya is the cosmic energy or *shakti* with two components: *yoga* and *maya*. You detach yourself from

maya and attach to yoga; that is the movement. Therefore, the beginning of yoga is detachment, dissociation from the socket of maya; the middle of yoga is shooonyata, nothingness; and the end of yoga is light, luminosity, perfection. That is when bhakti becomes the predominant expression, and also a lifestyle. Not a worshipping lifestyle, but a lifestyle which connects with everything: nature, people, the whole universe, and becomes one with that.

—8 and 9 December 2005

In the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna asks to see the cosmic form of Krishna, who then appears in a terrible form, which only a rare one endowed with divine eyes could see. Why the terrible and fearful form of god?

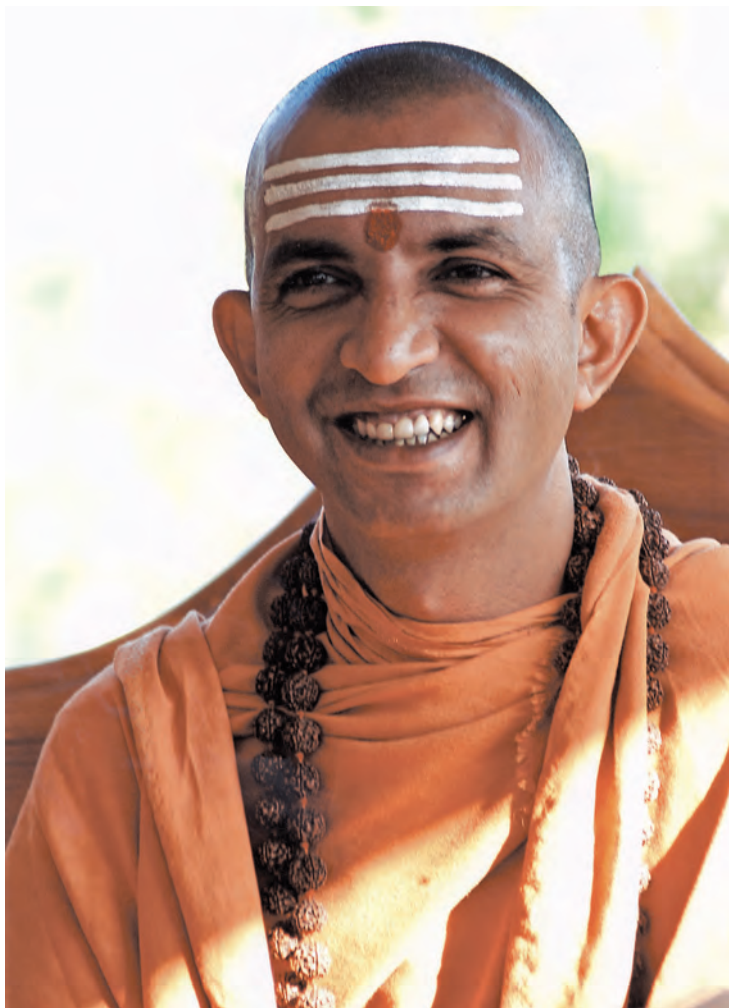
The ultimate form of God is always fearful. The reason is simple: can you fit the water of the entire ocean in one cup? No. If you try to do that, the cup will break. The cup is afraid of breaking, and so are you. The senses, the mind, the feelings get shattered, nothing is what was perceived to be, the fire consumes everything.

From a distance, the fire seems beautiful, light and warm. If you go closer and look into it, you feel the heat on your toes, the toes burn. If you try to merge yourself in the fire, you will burn, and that burning is a fearful experience. The senses cannot handle it, the intellect cannot handle it, the feelings cannot handle it. The ultimate form of God is the form that changes the person completely, therefore it is always fearful.

As far as other forms are concerned, you can imagine them and make them as pleasing, loving, kind, compassionate or big as you want to. However, how do you experience that *nirakara*, formless, state by a *sakara*, limited, mind? You can't, and when that *nirakara* form is seen even for a moment, it is like seeing the force of a tsunami for the first time. You have played with water many times, but never seen the force of a tsunami. Just because

you can swim in the water doesn't mean you are safe from a tsunami. It's that incredible force that you encounter: unfathomable by the human mind, and it is definitely a nerve-wracking experience.

—21 December 2005



2006

THE YOGA SUTRAS

Yoga has three components: the theory, the practice and what can be lived. The first component is the theory. For example, the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali explain the theory of yoga in its four chapters: Samadhi Pada, Sadhana Pada, Vibhooti Pada and Kaivalya Pada. What is a vritti, what is chitta, what is anushasana, what is pranayama, what is samadhi, what are the different states of consciousness, what are the different kinds of vrittis: all this is defined in the *Yoga Sutras*. This is the theoretical component of yoga.

The second component of yoga is the practices, the techniques: what do you do? There is a theory of pratyahara, yet what are the practices leading to pratyahara? There is a theory of dharana, yet what are the practices leading to dharana? There is a theory of dhyana, yet what are the practices leading to dhyana? There is a theory of pranayama, yet what are the practices leading to perfection at the level of pranayama defined by Sage Patanjali? There are thousands of techniques, not one, two or three. For example, it is stated in hatha yoga that there are 8,400,000 asanas. Who can know all of them? Even if we were to practise one asana a day from the time we were born, we would not complete them. In the same manner, there are many techniques, practices and systems that can

lead to the attainment of the aspirations as set out in the theory.

After the theory and the practice comes the third component of yoga: what can be lived, what you can adopt and practise, which becomes part of your sadhana, your spiritual effort. Raja yoga in the *Yoga Sutras* must be understood in this context. From the many theories and practices, you have to distil what is necessary according to your personal aspiration and live that until the completion of the aspiration.

The entire system of yoga has to be seen in terms of theory, practice and what can be lived. Samadhi is a theory. Meditation is a practice leading to samadhi, yet is samadhi liveable? You can attain it, and maybe one day you will have fantastic experiences, yet will you be able to live it for the remainder of your life? If you can then you become a saint, and then you cannot exist in society as you are now. You can experience samadhi for a day in society, but you cannot live it because the environment will not support it, and if you cannot live the attainment, cross it off the list.

Anushasana

Sage Patanjali's first three sutras define the process of raja yoga. During this process, a change takes place in personal behaviour, which is known as *anushasana*, discipline. For example, you go to a place of worship with a particular sentiment and you have to abide by the restrictions set by that sentiment. Each sentiment creates a *sambandha*, a defined relationship, and that sentiment has to be lived. You don't go to a temple, church or mosque and start disco dancing; you act with decorum. Decorum represents the natural ability to adapt to a situation. At a party there is dancing; in a place of worship there is serenity; at home there is happiness; in the office there is work. You maintain and abide by the disciplines of that environment.

When you abide by the discipline, you are at peace with yourself; however, the moment you step out of line, you will

find conflict. The moment the mind begins to flirt with this thought, that idea, this desire, that emotion, this feeling, that aspiration, tension, confusion and hardship are created. The inner balance and natural discipline is lost. As long as you are at peace, your mind is centred and focused, not dissipated. Therefore, the first step of raja yoga, anushasana, is behaving with decorum and being in harmony with it.

Containing the vrittis

Due to the vrittis, there is always some struggle, some rejection, some personal thing coming to the forefront. A vritti is just the mind revolving around a particular field. If you love somebody, no matter what you are doing, that person is always in your mind and thoughts: that is a vritti. If you dislike or quarrel with somebody, that person occupies your thoughts: that is a vritti. If a teacher reprimands a student, the student begins to feel he is being targeted: that is a vritti. When one theme or subject becomes obsessive and stays with you, that is known as a vritti. When the idea simply comes and goes then it is not a vritti.

There is the classic example of the retired man who developed high blood pressure after his daughter-in-law compared him to a dog. The image that came to his mind was of a mangy street dog. When he was advised to imagine a five-star, pampered dog instead, the cause of his hypertension, the self-image he had created, was alleviated. This is an example of a vritti that became the cause of a physical imbalance, the cause of mental and emotional conflict and confusion. This happens day in and day out in all circumstances. Misunderstandings create vrittis. Communication problems create vrittis. A state of mind is created, based not only on what you perceive through the senses but also on what goes through the head, through the heart, through the instincts.

The nature of a human being is like a monkey. If you put a hungry monkey in an orchard full of fruit trees, what will the monkey do? It will pick a fruit, nibble it, throw it away,

take another one and do the same thing, and in no time at all the whole orchard will be destroyed. The interesting thing is that not a single fruit will have been eaten totally. That is the relationship of the senses with sense objects, the relationship of an individual with the world, seeking satisfaction, happiness, security and comfort in life. If you look at yourself objectively, you will find that you have never eaten a single fruit totally; you have only nibbled bits here and there. It is this nature that has to be contained.

There is no stopping the vrittis; if the vrittis stop then we don't exist. We are able to contain a vritti, but we are not able to stop it. In the second sutra of Patanjali, the Sanskrit word 'nirodha' has been used – *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*. The word *virodha*, meaning 'to go against', has not been used. The word *avarodha*, meaning 'to block', has not been used. *Nirodha* means to hold, to contain, to gather, to stop the dissipation and to focus it. It is like a torch that can be focused from a broad beam to a narrow beam.

Imagine a dam full of water. If you make a small hole in the dam, the pressure of the water escaping from that outlet will be much higher and more intense than the normal flow of water in the river. That is the concept of nirodha: to contain, to restrain, to limit the scope of the interaction of the senses with the sense objects. Instead of taking a bite from twenty pieces of fruit, eat one whole fruit, then have a second, and after that is complete, have a third. When you are able to come to this point of containing the dissipated nature, an invisible mirror comes up in which you are able to see your own nature and your own face.

Drashta: expanded awareness

The third statement of the *Yoga Sutras* is: *Tada drashtuh svaroope avasthanam* – “Once the mind is managed and guided, you become the seer, the observer of your real self.” That seer is not restricted. You are able to see yourself as a totality, not only one part. The state of the seer becomes a living experience. It is not a momentary experience where

you suddenly become aware of yourself; it is a continuous experience. When the invisible mirror appears, you see your total self, not just what you experience at one moment in time. It is not like practising antar mouna where you are only aware of your thoughts and ignore everything else, or like practising ajapa japa where you are only aware of your breath and the mantra and ignore everything else.

Many things are happening in our body at many levels at the same time. For example, the lungs, heart and circulation are functioning, the brain, the mind, emotions, thoughts, desires, all the mental traits, are active. All the systems of the body and mind are working in harmony and unison, and any imbalance will manifest as a disease or illness. Yet, while so many things are happening, we are not aware of them.

When the drashta nature develops, an expanded awareness develops which allows you to perceive the totality of your nature, your interactions and behaviour in one glimpse, in one thought. The focus is not on one point; it is multidimensional. For example, when you look at your face in the mirror, you see your whole face; you do not count your ears, eyes, nose and mouth, but recognize them as being part of you. The drashta awareness is the same. When this kind of awareness takes place and the mental expressions have been stilled and contained, then the expressions have power, like water gushing out of a small hole in a dam; everything is contained, there is only one outlet, and all the shakti, all the force, is going through that outlet. What you think happens, what you speak happens. One becomes a *siddha*, a perfect being.

The real drashta is a siddha. Siddhas are always watchful of how they live, act and function. However, we are only making an attempt to look at our whole face; we are not able to see the total self. Just as you clean your physical teeth every day, you also have to clean your inner teeth, which bite other people in the form of anger, aggression, jealousy and hatred; then pramana is born. *Pramana*, knowledge based on direct intuitive experience, will come only when the state of

stithaprajna, steady wisdom, equipoise, is attained. When the vrittis are contained, whatever is spoken becomes a reality.

—14 February 2006

What is the right attitude and the most important quality a person aspiring for spiritual life, as a pure beginner, has to develop?

I do not believe there is a beginning or an end to spiritual life. The whole idea of spiritual life is based on pure, simple principles. The most appropriate principle has been mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* in the form of *samatvam yoga ucchate* – “Yoga is finding the balance and equilibrium within oneself.” This equilibrium is the balance between what is attainable and not attainable, between the perfectible and the not perfectible, between that which gives happiness and that which gives unhappiness. It is the balance between the two polarities of life. This is the first stepping stone of spiritual life.

The idea of balance does not end as long as there is life, for life is an expression of paradoxes from birth to death. Until the time of death, one has to find the strength to experience balance. One has to find the strength to live harmoniously. Living harmoniously means with awareness of the body: health and illness, with awareness of the mind: the pulls of the mind, and with the awareness of trying to find harmony and peace.

The discovery of harmony and peace constitutes the foundation stone of spiritual life. People say yoga begins with asana or other techniques. People say spiritual life begins with discipline. However, from the facts, ideas and experiences of the teachers and masters, the real spiritual life is developed and experienced when one begins to take control over the fluctuating states of the body and mind, and brings about balance in their expression.

You have to make the effort, you have to make the attempt to find this harmony, in thinking, in behaviour,

in action, in living, in the environment, at home, in your profession. The different practices of yoga do help, but realization of spiritual life begins with balancing oneself. Therefore, as a beginner or an advanced student, one always has to try to find this harmony in action, in non-action, in pain and pleasure, in happiness and discomfort. This is the ultimate test of human spiritual effort.

—28 April 2006

Is yoga helpful in treating disease, for example neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, etc.? Can it help to treat debilitating diseases like AIDS?

The important thing to know and remember is that yoga is not therapy. It should not be looked upon as therapy, rather as a way to discipline one's life. This discipline, *anushasana*, is multidimensional. It is physical at the level of annamaya kosha, pranic at the level of pranamaya kosha, mental at the level of manomaya kosha, psychic at the level of vijñanamaya kosha, and spiritual at the level of anandamaya kosha. These are the five dimensions of human existence and they are activated and regulated with the practices of yoga.

In the process of their activation and regulation, imbalances which cause distress in the body, mind or emotion are identified. With continued practice, these causes and imbalances are managed. With the management of these imbalances, there can be attainment of physical, mental, emotional health and wellbeing. In the process of attaining physical health, by regulating annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha, it has been found that many of the psychosomatic illnesses are helped. However, that does not make yoga a therapy. The moment you use yoga as therapy, you are treating only one aspect of your nature or personality, and in that case yoga will become ineffective. That is the reason why many people feel that they are not being helped with yoga practices, although they are doing

them religiously and vigorously to obtain relief from their physical disorder. At the same time, some people feel the benefit of yoga without much effort, as they have balance in disciplining all the five dimensions of their personality.

We have found that even with simple practices of pawanmuktasana, many times a miracle takes place in the management of disorders. I do believe that only pawanmuktasana series, if practised in the right manner, can eradicate many physiological and psychological imbalances. It is not necessary to go into a specific, diagnostic level of asanas and their benefits.

Of course, nobody has the time to think in this manner. Everybody wants quick results. Although there are many teachers and traditions that teach yoga as therapy, we do not subscribe to that philosophy. In that form of therapy, there might be temporarily relief, not permanent management. This has been the belief of the tradition we belong to, which originates with Swami Sivananda. He was a medical doctor and people would go to him with all kinds of complaints. He would combine the different systems; he would treat people with allopathic medicine and, where appropriate, encourage them to practise the different systems of yoga to have long-lasting health and achieve total management of their problems. Our own guru, Swami Satyananda, also taught us to look at a human being in five dimensions and treat each dimension, not just one.

Today, science is beginning to be aware of its limitations in the management of different problems and ills, and of the different areas that are involved in the treatment of a person. Science is also looking into methods not to treat but to improve the quality of life. Treatment is the negative aspect of life, and improving the quality of life is the positive aspect of life. Most treatments today do not cure a condition. If there is hypertension, take pills, manage your hypertension; it does not cure the cause of hypertension. There is diabetes, take tablets and injections to manage your diabetes, not to cure its cause. There is asthma, use a bronchial dilator so

you can breathe more freely, but not to cure the cause of asthma. In this manner, almost all methods of treatment are symptomatic treatments, not curative methods.

Cure is possible only when all the dimensions of the personality are treated integrally, and the distress and disturbances taken away from all these different levels. Therefore, we do not accept yoga as therapy. We accept yoga as a discipline to promote health at the physical level, to promote wellbeing at the psychological level, and to promote a spiritual awakening. With these three, one enjoys total health.

There are many examples I can give to indicate how simple and basic practices of yoga can manage complex problems. Our research in Australia on cancer patients showed that pawanmuktasana part I, yoga nidra, ajapa japa and nadi shodhana pranayama helped the reversal of cancer in patients. Yoga programs developed for HIV patients include pawanmuktasana, yoga nidra and mantra. That's all. Of course, science or medicine will not accept this. It will take time for science to understand the yogic approach. When this happens, we will have a very powerful tool of attaining health. Until then, there will be many discussions, scientific forums and medical forums, at the ashram grounds or in seminar halls, and at each place you will get a different answer.

—28 April 2006

Should we observe any restriction in the act of giving?

If someone wants to commit a bad deed, like a robbery, there will be a lot of planning before an attempt is actually made. The act of giving should involve four times as much planning. However, to do a good deed usually there is no planning, no thinking or rationality, just spur of the moment action.

Nobody understands how to give. Giving a flower, or money, or implements, tools, houses, and cows are not gifts.

They are mediums through which something else is attained: encouragement, teaching, hope, and knowing that somebody cares for you. If we want to help someone, we have to plan the direction in which their life has to develop and evolve. Indiscriminate handouts will not make any difference to anyone in the long run.

The biggest example at present is in Rikhia. The act of giving in Rikhia, whether for one person or for ten thousand, has a focus and a direction that will take the individual towards that aim. A farmer will become more skilful and more acquainted with the rules and techniques of farming. A labourer will become more efficient. A child will be more interested in learning. In this way, each life can be given a direction through the act of giving.

That constitutes the richest planning in the act of giving, as each person is being directed on a particular path for their peace and prosperity. Whatever the external act may be, each person is fulfilling their own destiny and being trained to live in a dignified manner. Therefore, do not take the act of giving lightly. It can become a very powerful tool for peace and prosperity, if there is proper planning, implementation and organization. The giver has to be organized in terms of facts and ideas. Swami Sivananda does not really advocate the act of giving for beginners on the spiritual path. For him, giving is the third level. First, learn how to serve; then learn how to love. Until the idea of service develops and matures in you, and unless the idea of love develops and matures in you, there is no such thing as giving.

—11 May 2006

Can a mother become a catalyst for change in the routine and behaviour of her grown-up children?

As individual beings, we all have certain obligations and responsibilities to help each other, but instead we try to impose ourselves on other people. When we find that the other person has not really accepted what we want to impose,

conflict occurs. The psychological disturbance creates a split and a distance between two people.

Parents have the biggest psychological problems in the world, as they do not see their children as having their own destiny, their own karma and their own life. They see their offspring as an extension of their ambition, not as an extension of their life, and they try to give the samskaras of their ambition to their children from birth.

When the child is endowed with your samskaras, how can you say later that you cannot control your child, when you have given them that direction from the beginning? It is the parents who have problems, not the children. Parents can overcome their problem by learning to give the samskara of life to children, not the samskara of their ambition. When the basic foundation is correct, the building will be solid, whereas if the basic foundation is wrong, the building will crash one day.

How do you cultivate the spiritual samskara, the right samskara? First, cultivate it within yourself, rather than trying to cultivate it in others. Cultivate the quality of being a friend to your child. First make that change in yourself. Do not be a father or a mother to your child; be a friend. Develop that association and you will see that it can work miracles. It will give them the samskaras of life and not make them a carbon copy of your lost dreams and unfulfilled ambitions. Therefore, rather than worrying about how they can change their children, parents should be concerned with how they can learn to be a friend to their children.

—11 May 2006

What is the definition of discipline, restraint and suppression?

Let us start with suppression. I don't have to define it, you know what it is. As long as everything is natural, normal and regular, there is no cause for suppression. However, when there is something abnormal and irregular, then suppression

comes in as a way to balance that irregularity. For instance, if there are high ambitions, high dislikes, high likes, high expectations, and one is not able to deal with them, mental confusion sets in and they go down into the unconscious level. That is where the process of suppression begins. We begin to suppress to maintain our balance and peace.

We treat suppression as circumstantial, environmental, or social. In reality, suppression is misrepresented. Suppression is the inability to attain or achieve. You can apply this principle to any situation in life and you will find that it is true. There is suppression in relationships, beliefs, ideas, expressions. There is suppression in the guise of tradition, moral and ethical values, or discipline, and many suppressions are self-created.

The theory behind natural suppression is quite simple. You plant the seed. It grows. In the course of its growth, many different little branches and leaves come out. It has to be pruned to ensure that it grows properly. If you do not prune and shape the tree, you cannot ensure that it will grow well. Similarly, in our society, in our laws – social, spiritual, religious – there are limiting factors which inhibit and restrict the lopsided growth of human nature. When we are unable to understand that, there is a reaction. This reaction is generally of rejection, over-assertiveness, to prove one is right. The reaction is always to justify something to feel happy that ‘I have not done anything wrong’.

Restraint brings in the component of understanding to reaction. When you begin to understand your nature, your environment, your surroundings and begin to live in accordance with your surroundings, then restraint becomes a natural part of life. This restraint leads to discipline, which is the fine-tuning of personality and habit. I will give you one simple example: waking up at four in the morning. Why is the mind so weak that it cannot wake up at four in the morning? After three days, one week, or one month of waking up at four, you fall flat. That means the strength of the mind can only last you for that length of time. When you

struggle with yourself, that is known as imposing discipline on yourself.

There is a better way to deal with this problem. I will give you my example. I used to sleep a lot when I first came to the ashram. I was such a deep sleeper that people could carry me from one end of the ashram to the other, along with my chowki, and I would not even know it. There were many days of my life when I have woken up outside the gates of the ashram! I decided, 'I am going to change this habit.' At first I started off like all of you: have the alarm clock set at four. First day: up, alert, early; second day: up, alert; third day: up; fourth day: up, and then down again; fifth day: back to square one. So, what to do?

Struggling to wake up at four was like imposing something on myself that I did not control or manage. Sri Swamiji gave me the solution. He said, simply set the alarm early by five minutes every day. I asked myself: what time do I normally get up? Six o'clock. First day: set the alarm at five minutes to six; second day: ten minutes to six; third day: quarter to six; fourth day: twenty minutes to six. In this way, I reached four o'clock. There was gradual conditioning, gradual training to shift from the state of a deep sleeper to a state of mind which would wake up by just deciding 'I am going to get up at this time.' If I had struggled every day with the alarm at four, it would have been a hard-imposed discipline which I would not have perfected.

In order to live discipline, *anushasana*, there has to be a proper tuning of the mental attitude, mental pattern, mental behaviour, mental conditioning, mental habit. Therefore, discipline is something much deeper than suppression or restraint. Discipline is fine-tuning and creating or conditioning where the habits are gradually lessened. How do you lessen a H-A-B-I-T? Remove the letter 'H'; 'A BIT' will remain; when you are comfortable, remove the letter 'A'; 'BIT' will remain; when you are comfortable, remove the letter 'B'; 'IT' will remain; and when you are comfortable, remove the letter 'I'; and 'T' will

remain. In that way, you lessen your habit. You fine-tune the personality.

Anushasana or yogic discipline is the fine-tuning of the personality, while restraint indicates understanding the reactions, and suppression indicates ignorant reaction.

—11 October 2006

THE MYSTERY OF YAJNA

For a complete picture of yajna, we have to look at three factors: the event, the vision behind the event, and the source of that vision. However, even when we get a complete picture, we will still not be able to understand yajna. Understanding is a cerebral process and yajna is a non-cerebral, abstract and non-linear experience. You cannot experience it through the heart either. Just as you have to bypass the intellect, you also have to bypass feelings. Those things that cannot be explained or even felt in their totality are mysterious. Yajna is a mystery, just as God is a mystery, life is a mystery, mind is a mystery. Everything that is unfathomable and incomprehensible is mysterious, and that mystery represents an ongoing, evolving process within. We must have these experiences in life so we can experience something deeper than the normal body-mind-spirit ideas. Therefore, if you think that you will understand something, just know that you will not. You simply have to be and become.

Yajna as a spiritual means

There comes a time when, for a moment, we are able to experience the integrated form of body-mind-spirit in which the universe is contained in us and we are contained in the universe, when we are able to break through the heart of the body-mind-spirit unit and take a peek into infinity. Yajna becomes a process that allows us that peek into the infinite spiritual dimension. We all see yajna differently.

Some see the organization and beauty outside. Others see the essence inside. Somehow we tend to hold on to the edge of that experience, not the whole which cannot be defined or rationalized. The edge is what will inspire you eventually to discover the principle of bliss and peace inside. The impressions you carry back help you to discover what you have received from your experience. You have all seen and heard the same things: Sri Swamiji, the kanyas, the batuks, the havan, the mantras; yet, has that experience educated you in any way? It is the knowledge and teaching you received from your experience that will eventually uplift you.

You have to educate yourself through the memories that you retain. It is like putting your hand in fire; you know that it burns, yet even with that knowledge you may continue doing it. Only the education you derive from your experience will stop you from doing it again. One level of knowledge is realized and then the understanding becomes alive. Yajna, yoga, asana, meditation, mantras or worship give an understanding of and education in something definite and specific related to your life. They inspire and give you a glimpse into another reality of life. Therefore, the event, the vision behind the event, and the source of that vision have to be seen in relation to each other, and then the understanding that comes to you will be your own inspiration and motivation.

Sat Chandi Mahayajna

Sat Chandi Mahayajna is an ancient tantric worship of the Cosmic Mother, performed through invocation, chanting of mantras, creation of yantras, formation of mandalas, and fire ceremony. The Sat Chandi Mahayajna conducted in Rikhia is part of another yajna, the Rajasooya Yajna, which in ancient times was performed by kings and emperors. It symbolized the sharing of their achievements and prosperity with their subjects. After conquering new territories, they would return to their kingdoms and distribute the wealth through the medium of this yajna.

The Rajasooya Yajna was, and is, a yajna to share what one has achieved and attained in life. Due to the magnitude of the yajna, only kings and emperors could perform it. In Rikhia, it is performed as a tribute to the work that Sri Swamiji has done in relation to yoga. The Sat Chandi Mahayajna becomes the medium to invoke the cosmic energy, the benevolent force.

The medium of the yajna

Two forces: the children, and Sri Swamiji who was present on all five days, are the medium through which the yajna was performed. There was a synergy between the kanyas, batuks and Sri Swamiji. The shakti could be seen flowing out of Sri Swamiji into the kanyas and batuks, transforming their attitudes, responses and performance. The kanyas and batuks became the medium to channel the energy of Sri Swamiji during the yajna.

As Sri Swamiji has told us, a yajna has three main components: gifting, worship and satsang. However, no component of a yajna ever achieves the mark unless it is guided by a sankalpa. Sri Swamiji took a sankalpa of 'peace, plenty and prosperity for all' eleven years ago in 1995 when he started the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. This sankalpa, and Swami Sivananda's sankalpa to serve, love and give, have become the motivating force, the spirit behind the yajna.

Swami Sivananda used to say that any sadhana a person does for his or her own upliftment and emancipation still reflects the selfish nature of the individual. Only when one is able to connect with *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in others, does spiritual life begin to unfold, not before. Sri Krishna has also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13) that the first qualification of a competent and likeable person is *adveshta sarvabhutanam*, regarding all beings as oneself. The beginning of spiritual life is experiencing and living in unity, in oneness.

Living in God's home

The sankalpas of Swami Satyananda and Swami Sivananda have their roots in the spiritual precepts of the first mantra of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*:

Om Ishaa vaasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyaam jagat.

This entire creation is God's house; we are living in God's house. God pervades the entire creation.

All that exists in this ever-changing universe is the abode of the Lord, in which the Lord resides. Enjoy whatever the Lord gives you. Do not covet, for indeed whose wealth is it?

Generally, indiscipline and irregularity are the two common barriers in our evolution. This becomes the cause of *ashanti*, the absence of peace, giving birth to distress. In order to find solace, we try to understand some principle, system or idea by which we can regain our balance. The best principle is given in the mantra quoted above. It says that creation is God's home. Believe that you are living in God's home and live with dignity. There is a system and order in every house, in every society. If you begin to believe that this entire creation is God's home and you are living in it, you will make an effort to remain within the structure of what is just and appropriate. Half the problems will disappear because you will not do anything wrong in God's home, just as you will not do anything wrong in your own home.

This mantra from the *Ishavasya Upanishad* has guided the vision of the seers through the ages. We have to try to create an awareness that the kingdom of heaven is here. This reflects the harmony between our material life and spiritual aspirations. With the combination of the material and the spiritual, life evolves towards truth, *sat*, towards the expansive nature, *chit*, and towards bliss, *ananda*.

Seva as a means to purify

In the course of our evolution, there are different needs that have to be addressed in terms of the level of

consciousness, the behaviour of the mind. At one time, the need was *ahimsa*, non-violence, and that was propagated by Buddha, Mahavira, and others. In this age, the need has been *seva*, service, as a means of connecting with others. Seva, along with *prem*, love, and *daan*, gifting, leads to purification.

The four components of Swami Sivananda's yoga: serve, love, give and purify, are the outcomes of this ancient upanishadic thought. In order to live in the house of God with dignity, purification is a must, which comes through selfless service and unconditional love. The ability to let go and overcome needs is the concept of purity that leads to the awakening of the spirit.

When Swami Satyananda gave the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity, nobody thought that it reflected a deeper spiritual meaning. Peace can be had only when all the absences are gone from life. In order to get rid of the absences, you need to have plenty, and in order to acquire plenty, you have to be prosperous. 'Prosperous' does not mean rich; prosperous means having the means to attain. Therefore, peace, plenty and prosperity became the message for those who are looking for the fulfilment of the most immediate needs in life, whether material or spiritual.

Open heart surgery

The biggest message of this Sat Chandi Mahayajna is that we all need to have 'open heart surgery'. The arteries are blocked by heavy deposits, which have to be removed. How can that happen? Think about it. In that one phrase, Sri Swamiji has indicated many thoughts about improving the quality of life. Therefore, try to focus on one and work to overcome the blockages of the heart. If that is possible, then the message of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna will have been lived by everyone.

—28 November 2006

Does a yoga practitioner need to take diksha?

A yoga practitioner need not take diksha; it is the spiritual aspirant who has to take diksha. There is a difference between a yoga practitioner and a spiritual aspirant. There are thousands and millions of yoga practitioners in the world who go to stretch their bodies, and there are many traditions which are physically-oriented and do not emphasize the need for diksha. Therefore, yoga practice as such does not require initiation. However, those who wish to cultivate the spiritual component of their life need the right tool, and for them diksha is important. After all, if you want to turn on the light in a room, you will have to find a switch. Diksha acts like a switch to illuminate the dark dimensions of the room which you have not yet been able to look into. So, only those who are keen to, and who aspire to develop the spiritual component of their life need diksha, not every yoga practitioner.

—14 December 2006

What are the qualities of a good disciple?

Discipleship becomes more meaningful when you are able to improve yourself. One of the tools for improving yourself is the SWAN model. If you work with your S (strength), W (weakness), A (ambitions) and N (needs), and improve yourself, then that improved nature will make you a better disciple.

The foundation of discipleship is the trust, understanding and belief that can exist between teacher and student, disciple and master. Some people believe a little bit. Some people believe too much. The discipleship is based on that individual expression. There is the story of Padmapada, Shankaracharya's cook. Padmapada used to cook for Shankaracharya whenever he would be travelling around the country. One day, they camped near a river. Shankaracharya was on one shore and Padmapada on the other. Shankaracharya called out to him, "Come quickly." Hearing his master's voice, the cook simply ran across the water. As he ran, wherever his steps fell, a lotus came up to support him. When he reached the

other side, Shankaracharya said to him, “From today you are Padmapada (lotus foot).” He became one of the acharyas of the Shankaracharya tradition.

This story indicates that when the call comes from the guru, the worthy disciple guides himself to the fulfilment of that call. That level of one-pointed awareness of the guru also brings out many inherent qualities and powers from within. This has happened in the lives of many people. Thus, the foundation of discipleship is trust, conviction and faith. This comes from understanding.

Discipleship develops as you become more *gurumukhi*, focused towards guru, towards that inspiration, that source. Therefore, there is no direct answer as to which qualities are important for a disciple. Different components are used to launch oneself and go through the process of improvement. In order to make yourself more capable of understanding the ideas and live the concept of discipleship, you have to go through a screening, which can be achieved through the SWAN model. You have to differentiate between the appropriate and the inappropriate. You have to work at many levels.

—15 December 2006



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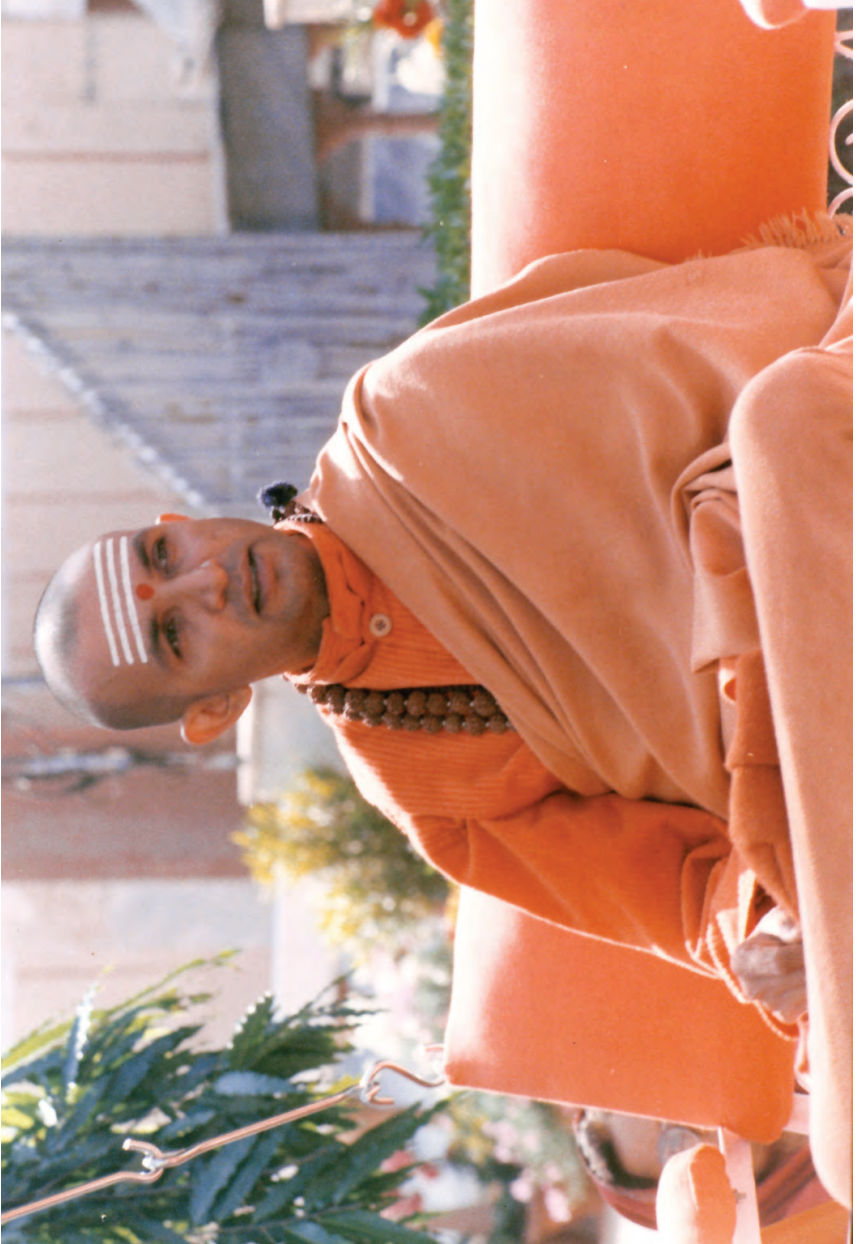
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Notes

















Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
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On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger.

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